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MEMOIRS

OF

ROBERT-HOUDIN

AMBASSADOR, AUTHOR, AND CONJUROR.

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WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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1859.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

In my humble capacity of translator of Robert-Houdin's life, I may be permitted to make one or two remarks, and answer in anticipation the objections which I feel confident will be raised.

In the first place, I am perfectly well aware that this English copy of Houdin's book will strike many of my readers as even more Gallicised than the original; but I beg to assure them I have produced this impression from malice prepense. It would have been a very easy task for me to have made the book thoroughly English; but I feel, had I done so, it would have been as flat as yesterday's champagne. The great merit of the book, to my mind, is the intense belief M. Houdin has in his mission, and though no Englishman would

write of himself in such a satisfied tone, I am firmly convinced that the arch-conjuror is actuated by the same feelings which induced Vatel to fall on his sword because the fish did not arrive in time. Death before disgrace! is apparently Houdin's motto. Granting this indulgence for his "brave 'ords," I thought it much better to present him to my readers as a real Frenchman, and not to endeavour to array him in an English garb, in which he would have been a non-descript.

Exception may be taken, also, to the attributes I have ascribed to him on my title-page. But, a slight consideration will prove the justice of my choice. That he is an author, almost a novelist, the Torrini episode will sufficiently prove; he was an ambassador most decidedly, if success be any criterion of diplomacy; while his claim to the rank of conjuror will be granted by every one who saw him—and who did not?

Most refreshing, too, is the way in which he writes of England and the English; and in his sincerity he almost equals his countryman, who said, "I always speak the truth, and I must allow I have seen an

Englishman who had not red hair." When we remember how many artistes, after making a fortune among us, have repaid us by insulting perfidious Albion, I feel sure that my readers will give his "Reminiscences" a hearty welcome, and not think the worse of him because he does homage to the prevalent failing of the true-blooded Frenchman. I dare say, after all, that many Englishmen are equally convinced of their own supreme talent, though they do not express that opinion so naïvely as does Robert-Houdin.

LASCELLES WRAXALL.

KENSINGTON, MAY, 1859.

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THE OVERTURE.

Saint Gervais, near Blois,
September, 1858.

EIGHT o'clock has just struck: my wife and children are by my side. I have spent one of those pleasant days which tranquillity, work, and study can alone secure. With no regret for the past, with no fear for the future, I am—I am not afraid to say it—as happy as man can be.

And yet, at each vibration of this mysterious hour, my pulse starts, my temples throb, and I can scarce

breathe, so much do I feel the want of air and motion. I can reply to no questions, so thoroughly am I lost in a strange and delirious reverie.

Shall I confess to you, reader. And why not? for this electrical effect is not of a nature to be easily understood by you.

The reason for my emotion being extreme at this moment is, that, during my professional career, eight o'clock was the moment when I must appear before the public. Then, with my eye eagerly fixed on the hole in the curtain, I surveyed with intense pleasure the crowd that flocked in to see me. Then, as now, my heart beat, for I was proud and happy of such success.

At times, too, a doubt, a feeling of uneasiness, would be mingled with my pleasure. "Heavens!" I would say to myself, in terror, "am I so sure of myself as to deserve such anxiety to see me?"

But, soon reassured by the past, I waited with greater calmness the signal for the curtain to draw up. I then walked on the stage: I was near the foot-lights,

before my judges—but no, I err—before my kind spectators, whose applause I was in hopes to gain.

Do you now understand, reader, all the reminiscences this hour evokes in me, and the solemn feeling that continually occurs to me when the clock strikes?

These emotions and souvenirs are not at all painful to me: on the contrary, I summon them up with pleasure. At times I even mentally transport myself to my stage, in order to prolong them. There, as before, I ring the bell, the curtain rises, I see my audience again, and, under the charm of this sweet illusion, I delight in telling them the most interesting episodes of my professional life. I tell them how a man learns his real vocation, how the struggle with difficulties of every nature begins, how, in fact——

But why should I not convert this fiction into a reality? Could I not, each evening when the clock strikes eight, continue my performances under another form? My public shall be the reader, and my stage a book.

This idea pleases me: I accept it with joy, and im-

mediately give way to the sweet illusion. Already I fancy myself in the presence of spectators whose kindness encourages me. I imagine they are waiting for me—they are listening eagerly.

Without further hesitation I begin.

MEMOIRS

OF

ROBERT-HOUDIN.

CHAPTER I.

My Birth and Parentage—My Home—The Lessons of Colonel Bernard—Paternal Ambition—My first Mechanical Attempts—Had I but a Rat!—A Prisoner's Industry—The Abbé Larivière—My Word of Honour—Farewell to my darling Tools.

In conformity with the traditional custom which expects every man who writes his Memoirs—or, not to use too strong language, his confessions—to display his patent of gentility, I commence by stating to my readers, with a certain degree of pride, that I was born at Blois, the birthplace of Louis XII., surnamed the "Father of his People," and of Denis Papin, the illustrious inventor of the steam-engine.

So much for my native town. As for my family, it would only appear natural, regard being had to the art to which I devoted my life, that I should display in my

family tree the name of Robert *le Diable*, or of some mediæval sorcerer; but, being the very slave of truth, I will content myself with stating that my father was a watchmaker.

Though he did not rise to the elevation of the Berthouds and the Breguets, my father was reputed to be very skilful in his profession. In fact, I am only displaying our hereditary modesty when I say that my father's talents were confined to a single art; for, in truth, nature had adapted him for various branches of mechanics, and the activity of his mind led him to try them all with equal ardour. An excellent engraver, a jeweller of the greatest taste, he at the same time could carve the arm or leg for some fractured statuette, restore the enamel on any time-worn porcelain, or even repair musical snuff-boxes, which were very fashionable in those days. The skill he evinced in these varied arts at length procured him a most numerous body of customers; but, unfortunately, he was wont to make any repairs not strictly connected with his own business for the mere pleasure.

In this house, which I may almost term artistic, and in the midst of tools and implements in which I was destined to take so lively an interest, I was born and educated. I possess an excellent memory, still, though my reminiscences date back so far, I cannot remember the day of my birth. I have learned since, however, that it was the 6th of December, 1805. I am inclined to believe that I came into the world with a file or

a hammer in my hand, for, from my earliest youth, those implements were my toys and delight: I learned how to use them as other children learn to walk and talk. I need not say that my excellent mother had frequently to wipe away the young mechanic's tears when the hammer, badly directed, struck my fingers. As for my father, he laughed at these slight accidents, and said, jokingly, that it was a capital way of driving my profession into me, and that, as I was a wonderful lad, I could not but become an extraordinary workman. I do not pretend that I ever realised the paternal predictions, but it is certain that I have ever felt an irresistible inclination for mechanism.

How often, in my infantile dreams, did a benevolent fairy open before me the door of a mysterious El Dorado, where tools of every description were piled up. The delight which these dreams produced on me were the same as any other child feels when his fancy summons up before him a fantastic country where the houses are made of chocolate, the stones of sugar-candy, and the men of gingerbread. It is difficult to understand this fever for tools; the mechanic, the artist, adores them, and would ruin himself to obtain them. Tools, in fact, are to him what a MS. is to the archæologist, a coin to the antiquary, or a pack of cards to a gambler: in a word, they are the implements by which a ruling passion is fed.

By the time I was eight years of age I had furnished proofs of my ability, partly through the kindness of an

excellent neighbour, and partly through a dangerous illness, when my forced idleness gave me leisure to exercise my natural dexterity. This neighbour, M. Bernard, was a colonel on half-pay. Having been a prisoner for many years, he had learned how to make an infinity of toys, which he taught me as an amusement, and I profited so well by his lessons, that in a very short time I could equal my master. I fancy I can still see and hear this old soldier, when, passing his hand over his heavy grey moustache, he exclaimed with energetic satisfaction, "Why, the young scamp can do anything he likes." This compliment flattered my childish vanity, and I redoubled my efforts to deserve it.

With my illness my pleasures ended: I was sent to school, and from that time I had few opportunities for indulging in my favourite tasks. Still, on my holidays, I used to return to my father's workshop with delight, and, yet, I must have been a great torment to that excellent parent. Owing to my want of skill, I now and then broke some tool, and although I might try to conceal it, the blame was generally laid on me, and, as a punishment, I was forbidden to enter the workshop. But it was of no use attempting to keep me from my hobby; the prohibition had to be continually renewed. Hence it was thought advisable to attack the evil at the root, and I must be sent away from home.

Although my father liked his trade, experience had taught him that a watchmaker rarely makes a fortune

in a country town; in his paternal ambition he, therefore, dreamed a more brilliant destiny for me, and he formed the determination of giving me a liberal education, for which I shall always feel grateful to him. He sent me to college at Orleans. I was then eleven years of age.

Let who will sing the praises of school life; for my own part, I can safely state, that, though I was not averse from study, the happiest day I spent in our monastic seminary was that on which I left it for good. However, once entered, I accepted my lot with resignation, and became in a short time a perfect schoolboy. In my play hours my time was well employed, for I spent the greater portion of it in making pieces of mechanism. Thus I made snares, gins, and mouse-traps, their excellent arrangement, and perhaps the dainty bait as well, producing me a great number of prisoners.

I had built for them a charming open cage, in which I had fixed up a miniature gymnastic machinery. My prisoners, while taking their ease, set in motion a variety of machines, which caused a most agreeable surprise. One of my inventions more especially attracted the admiration of my comrades; it was a method of raising water by means of a pump made almost entirely of quills. A mouse, harnessed like a horse, was intended to set this Lilliputian machine in motion by the muscular strength of its legs; but, unfortunately, my docile animal, though perfectly willing,

could not overcome the resistance of the cog-wheels, and I was forced, to my great regret, to lend it a hand.

"Ah! if I only had a rat!" I said to myself, in my disappointment, "how famously it would work!" A rat! But how to get one? That appeared to me an insurmountable difficulty, but, after all, it was not so. One day, having been caught in the act of breaking bounds by a monitor, I was awarded twelve hours' imprisonment. This punishment, which I suffered for the first time, produced a violent effect on me: but in the midst of the sorrowful reflections inspired by the solitude, an idea dissipated my melancholy thoughts by offering a famous suggestion.

I knew that at nightfall the rats used to come from an adjacent church into the cell where I was confined, to regale on the bread-crumbs left by prisoners. It was a capital opportunity to obtain one of the animals I required; and as I would not let it slip, I straightway set about inventing a rat-trap. My only materials were a pitcher holding water, and, consequently, my ideas were confined exclusively to this. I, therefore, made the following arrangement.

I began by emptying my pitcher; then, after putting in a piece of bread, I laid it down so that the orifice was on a level with the ground. My object was to attract the victim by this dainty into the trap. A brick which I dug up would serve to close the opening, but as it was impossible for me in the darkness to

notice the exact moment for cutting off the prisoner's retreat, I laid near the bread a piece of paper, which would rustle as the rat passed over it.

As soon as night set in, I crouched close to my pitcher, and, holding the brick in my hand, I awaited with feverish anxiety the arrival of my guests. The pleasure I anticipated from the capture must have been excessive to overcome my timidity when I heard the first leaps of my savage visitors. I confess that the antics they performed round my legs occasioned me great nervousness, for I knew not how far the voracity of these intrepid rodents might extend; still, I kept my ground, not making the slightest movement, through fear of compromising the success of my scheme, and was prepared to offer the assailants a vigorous resistance in case of an attack.

More than an hour passed in vain expectation, and I was beginning to despair of the success of my trap, when I fancied I heard the slight sound I hoped for as a signal. I laid the brick on the mouth of the pitcher directly, and raised it up; the shrill cries inside convinced me of my success, and I began a pæan of triumph, both to celebrate my victory and to frighten away my prisoner's comrades. The porter, when he came to release me, helped me to master my rat by fastening a piece of twine to one of his hind legs, and burdened with my precious booty, I proceeded to the dormitory, where masters and pupils had been asleep for a long time. I was glad enough to sleep too, but

a difficulty presented itself—how should I bestow my prisoner?

At length a bright idea occurred to me, fully worthy of a schoolboy: it was to thrust the rat headforemost into one of my shoes. After fastening the twine to the leg of my bed, I pushed the shoe into one of my stockings, and placed the whole in the leg of my trousers. This being accomplished, I believed I could go to bed without the slightest cause for apprehension. The next morning, at five exactly, the inspector took a turn through the dormitory to arouse the sleepers.

"Dress yourself directly," he said, in that amiable voice peculiar to gentlemen who have risen too soon.

I proceeded to obey, but I was fated to dire disgrace: the rat I had packed away so carefully, not finding its quarters airy enough, had thought proper to gnaw through my shoe, my stocking, and my trouser, and was taking the air through this improvised window. Fortunately, it had not cut through the retaining string, so the rest was a trifle.

But the inspector did not regard matters in the same light as I did. The capture of a rat and the injury to my clothes were considered further aggravations of my previous offence, and he sent in a lengthy report to the head-master. I was obliged to appear before the latter dressed in the clothes that bore the proof of my offence, and, by an unlucky coincidence, shoe, stocking, and trouser were all injured on the same leg. The Abbé Larivière (our head-master) managed the

college with truly paternal care; ever just, and prone by nature to forgiveness, he was adored by his pupils, and to be out of favour with him was regarded as the severest punishment.

"Well, Robert," he said to me, looking kindly over the spectacles which bridged the end of his nose, "I understand you have been guilty of grave faults. Come, tell me the whole truth."

I possessed at that time a quality which, I trust, I have not lost since, and that is extreme frankness. I gave the abbé a full account of my misdeeds, and my sincerity gained me pardon. The head-master, after a vain attempt to repress it, burst into a loud fit of laughter on hearing the catastrophe of my adventures. Still, he ended his gentle lecture in the following words:

"I will not scold you any more, Robert. I believe in your repentance: twelve hours' confinement are sufficient punishment, and I grant you your release. I will do more: though you are very young, I will treat you as a man—of honour, though—you understand me? You will pledge me your word not only that you will not commit your old faults again, but, as your passion for mechanics makes you often neglect your lessons, you must promise to give up your tools, and devote yourself henceforth to study."

"Oh yes, sir, I give you my word," I exclaimed, moved to tears by such unexpected indulgence; "and I can assure you you will never repent having put faith in my promise."

I made up my mind to keep my pledge, although I was fully aware of all the difficulties, which were so many stumbling-blocks in that path of virtue I wished to follow. Much trouble I had, too, at first, in withstanding the jests and sarcasms of the idler of my comrades, who, in order to hide their own bad conduct, strove to make all weak characters their accomplices. Still, I broke with them all. Sharpest pang of all, though, was the sacrifice I made in burning my vessels —that is, in putting aside my cages and their contents; I even forgot my tools, and thus, free from all external distraction, I devoted myself entirely to my Greek and Latin studies.

The praise I received from the Abbé Larivière, who prided himself in having noticed in me the stuff for an excellent scholar, rewarded me for this sublime effort, and I may say I became, thenceforth, one of the most studious and attentive lads in the college. At times, I certainly regretted my tools and my darling machinery, but, recollecting my promise to the headmaster, I held firm against all temptation. All I allowed myself was to set down by stealth on paper a few ideas that occurred to me, though I did not know whether I should ever have a chance to put them in practice.

At length the moment arrived for my leaving college; my studies were completed—I was eighteen years of age.

CHAPTER II.

A Country Idler—Dr. Carlosbach, Conjuror and Professor of Mystification—The Sand-bag and the Stirrup Trick—I turn Lawyer's Clerk, and the Minutes appear to me very long—A small Automaton—A respectful Protest—I mount a Step in the Office—A Machine of Porter's Power—The Acrobatic Canaries—Monsieur Roger's Remonstrances—My Father decides that I shall follow my Bent.

In the story I have just narrated, only simple events were noticeable—hardly worthy, perhaps, of a man who has often passed for a sorcerer—but grant me a few pages' patience, reader, as an introduction to my artistic life, and what you seek in my book will be displayed before your eager gaze. You will know how a magician is produced, and you will learn that the tree whence my magic staff was cut was only that of persevering labour, often bedewed by the sweat of my brow: soon, too, when you come to witness my labours and my anxious hours of expectation, you will be able to appreciate the cost of a reputation in my mysterious art.

On leaving college, I at first enjoyed all the liberty I had been deprived of for so many years. The

power of going right or left, of speaking or remaining silent, as I listed, of getting up sooner or later, according to my fancy, was an earthly paradise for a collegian. I enjoyed this ineffable pleasure to the fullest extent: thus, in the morning—although habit made me wake at five—when the clock announced that once so dreaded hour, I burst into a loud laugh, and offered ferocious challenges to any number of invisible superintendents; then, satisfied by this slight retrospective vengeance, I went to sleep again till breakfast. After that meal I went out to indulge in a pleasant lounge about the streets; and I preferred walking in the public promenades, for thus I had better chances of finding something to attract my attention. In a word, not an event happened which I did not know, and I was the real amateur "penny-a-liner" of my native town.

Many of these incidents afforded very slight interest; one day, however, I witnessed a scene which produced a lasting effect upon me. One after-dinner, while walking along the side of the Loire, engaged with the thoughts suggested by the falling autumn leaves, I was aroused from my reverie by the sound of a trumpet, evidently blown by a practised performer. It may be easily supposed that I was not the last to obey this startling summons, and a few other idlers also formed a circle round the performer.

He was a tall fellow, with a quick eye, a sunburnt face, long and crispy hair, and he stemmed his fist in his side, while he held his head impudently high. His

costume, though rather "loud," was still cleanly, and announced a man who probably had "some hay in his boots," to use a favourite phrase of gentlemen in the same profession. He wore a maroon-coloured frock-coat, trimmed with large silver frogs, while round his neck was a black silk cravat, the two ends being passed through a jewelled ring, which a millionnaire would not have disdained—had it not unfortunately been paste. He wore no waistcoat, but his shirt was remarkably white, and on it glistened a heavy mosaic chain, with a collection of appendages, whose metallic sound loudly announced his every movement.

I had ample time to make these observations, for, as the audience collected but slowly, the stranger continued his trumpet overture for a quarter of an hour: at length, when an average crowd had assembled, the trumpet made way for the human voice. The artist laid the instrument on the ground, and walked round majestically to form a ring; then, stopping, he passed his hand through his hair, and began his address. Being little used to this charlatanism in the streets, I regarded the man with confiding admiration, and determined not to lose a word of his address.

"Gentlemen," he commenced, in a firm and sonorous voice, "pray hear me. I am not what I seem to be; I may say more, I am what I do *not* seem to be. Yes, gentlemen, yes—confess it—you take me for one of those scurvy beggars who want to

draw a few halfpence from your generosity. Well, you may undeceive yourselves. Though you see me on this spot to-day, I tell you that I have only come here for the relief of suffering humanity in general, then for your welfare in particular, as well as for your amusement."

Here the orator, whose accent plainly showed that he came from the banks of the Garonne, passed his hand once more through his hair, raised his head, sucked his lips, and, assuming an air of majestic dignity, continued:

"I will tell you presently who I am, and you will be able to estimate me at my true value; in the mean while, allow me to offer you a slight specimen of my skill."

The artist, having then formed the circle afresh, placed before him a small table, on which he arranged three tin goblets, so well polished that they might have been taken for silver; after which he fastened round his waist a red cotton velvet bag, into which he thrust his hands for some minutes—doubtlessly to prepare the tricks he intended to display—and the performance commenced.

During a long series of tricks, the nutmegs, at first invisible, appeared at the finger ends of the conjuror; then, they passed through the cups, under the table, into a spectator's pockets, and finally emerged, to the general delight, from the nose of a young looker-on. The latter took the matter quite seriously, and half

killed himself with sneezing, to see whether a few more spice balls might not be left in his brain. The address with which these tricks were done, and the apparent simplicity of the operator in the execution of these ingenious artifices, produced the most perfect illusion—at least, as far as I was concerned.

It was the first time I had ever witnessed such a sight: I was stupified, astounded! The man who could perform such marvels at his will seemed to me a superhuman being; hence I saw him put aside his cups with considerable regret. The audience seemed equally charmed; the artist perceived it, and took advantage of it, by making a sign that he had a few more words to say. Then, resting his hand on the table, he proceeded:

"Ladies and gentlemen! I was very pleased to notice the kind attention you devoted to my tricks, and I thank you for it" (here the conjuror bowed to the ground); "and, as I am anxious to prove that you have not to deal with an ungrateful person, I will attempt to repay in full the satisfaction you have made me feel. Deign to listen to me for a moment.

"I promised to tell you what I am: I will now satisfy you." (Sudden change of countenance, and evidence of great self-esteem.) "You behold in me the celebrated Dr. Carlosbach: the composition of my name reveals to you my Anglo-Francisco-Germanic origin. To praise myself would be like painting the lily; I will, therefore, content myself with saying that

I possess an enormous talent, and that my astounding reputation can only be equalled by my modesty. Elected, by acclamation, member of the most illustrious learned societies through the whole world, I incline before their judgment, which proclaims the superiority of my skill in the grand art of curing the human race."

This address, as strange as it was emphatic, was delivered with imperturbable assurance; still I fancied I noticed a twitching of the lips, that revealed the grand doctor's ill-restrained desire to laugh. For all that, I listened attentively to his discourse.

"But, gentlemen," he added, "I have said sufficient of myself; it is time to speak of my works. Learn, then, that I am the inventor of the Vermifuge Balsam, whose sovereign efficaciousness is indisputable. Yes, gentlemen, the worm, that enemy of the human race —the worm, the destroyer of everything existing—the worm, that obstinate preyer on the living and the dead, is at length conquered by my science; a drop, an atom of this precious liquor is sufficient to expel this fearful parasite for ever.

"And, gentlemen, such is the virtue of my marvellous balsam, that it not only delivers man from this frightful calamity during life, but his body has nothing to fear after death. Taking my balsam is a mode of embalming one's body prior to death; man is thus rendered immortal. Ah! gentlemen, were you but acquainted with all the virtues of my sublime discovery, you

would rush upon me and tear it from me; but, as that would be illegal, I check myself in time."

The orator, in fact, stopped, and dried his brow with one hand, while with the other he motioned to the crowd that he had not yet ended his discourse. A great number of the audience were already striving to approach the learned doctor; Carlosbach, however, did not appear to notice it, and, reassuming his dramatic posture, he continued as follows:

"But, you will ask me, what can be the price of such a treasure? can we be rich enough to purchase it? The moment has now arrived, gentlemen, to make you understand the full extent of my disinterestedness. This balsam, in the discovery of which I have worn away my days—this balsam, which sovereigns have purchased at the price of their crown—this balsam, in short, which is beyond all price—well, I make you a present of it!"

At these unexpected words, the crowd, panting with emotion, lifted up its eager arms, and implored the generosity of the doctor. But, what shameful deception! Carlosbach—the celebrated Doctor Carlosbach—this benefactor of humanity, suddenly altered his tone, and burst into an Homeric shout of laughter. The arms fell down spontaneously; the audience looked vacantly in each other's faces. At length one laughed. The contagion spread, and soon everybody was following the conjuror's example. He was the first to stop, and demanded silence:

"Gentlemen!" he then said, in a perfectly respectful tone, "do not be angry with me for the little trick I have played you; I wished thus to put you on your guard against those charlatans who daily deceive you, just as I have done myself. I am no doctor, but simply a conjuror, professor of mystification, and author of a book, in which you will find, in addition to the discourse I have just delivered, the description of a great number of conjuring tricks. Would you like to learn the art of amusing yourself in society? For sixpence you may satisfy your curiosity."

The conjuror produced from a box an enormous packet of books; then, going round the crowd, he soon disposed of his wares, thanks to the interest his talent had excited. The exhibition was over, and I returned home with my head full of a world of unknown sensations.

It will be readily supposed that I purchased one of these precious volumes. I hastened to examine it; but the false doctor continued his system of mystification in it, and despite all my good will, I could not understand one of the tricks he pretended to explain. However, I had the famous speech I have just quoted, as some sort of consolation.

I made up my mind to lay the book aside and think no more of it; but the marvels it announced returned to my mind every moment. "O Carlosbach!" I said, in my modest ambition, "if I possessed your talent, how happy I should feel!" and, filled with this idea, I decided on taking lessons of the learned professor.

Unfortunately, this determination was arrived at too late. When I proceeded to his lodgings, I learned that the conjuror had resorted to his own tricks, and had left his inn the previous evening, forgetting to pay the princely score he had run up. The innkeeper gave me the account of this last mystification on the part of the professor.

Carlosbach had arrived at his house with two trunks of unequal size and very heavy; on the larger of them was painted "Conjuring Apparatus," on the other, "Clothing." The conjuror, who stated that he had received various invitations to perform at the adjacent châteaux, had set off the evening before to fulfil one of these engagements. He had only taken with him one of his trunks, that containing the apparatus; and it was supposed he had left the other in his room as a security for the bill he had run up. The next day the host, surprised at finding his lodger still absent, thought it advisable to place his traps in some safe place. He, therefore, went into his bedroom; but the two trunks had disappeared, and in their place was an enormous bag filled with sand, on which was written:

THE MYSTIFYING BAG.

THE STIRRUP TRICK.*

I continued for some time longer to enjoy the con-

* This evidently means the same as our duch-and-durras. The stirrup trick is the last "pull" on human credulity.

templative life I had been pursuing; but at last satiety assailed me, and I was quite surprised one day at finding myself wearied of this life of idleness. My father, like a man who could read the human heart, had awaited this moment to talk seriously with me; he, therefore, took me aside one morning, and said, without further preface, in a kindly voice:

"My good boy, you have now quitted college with a sound education, and I have allowed you to enjoy fully the liberty for which you seemed to aspire. But you must see this is not sufficient for a livelihood; you must now enter on the world resolutely, and apply your parts to the profession you wish to embrace. That profession it is now time to choose; you have doubtlessly some inclination, some bias, and you must let me know it; speak, then, and you will find me inclined to second your views."

Although my father had frequently expressed his fears lest I should follow his trade, I thought, after these remarks, he had changed his mind, and I joyfully said:

"Of course I have an inclination, and you cannot be ignorant of it, for it is of very old standing. You know I never wished to be other than——"

My father guessed my thoughts, and would not allow me to finish.

"I see," he objected, "that you did not understand me, and I must explain my meaning more clearly. My desire is for you to choose a profession more lucra-

tive than my own. Consider, it would be unreasonable to bury the ten years' schooling for which I made such heavy sacrifices in my shop; remember, too, that, after thirty-five years' hard work, I have been hardly able to save sufficient provision for my old age. Then, pray, change your resolution, and give up your mania for making a 'parcel of filings.'"

My father, in this, merely followed the idea of many parents, who can only see the disagreeable side of their own trade. To this prejudice, I must allow, he added the praiseworthy ambition of the head of a family desirous that his son should rise a step higher on the social ladder than himself.

As I was utterly ignorant of all other professions or trades save that of a mechanician, I was unable to appreciate them, or consequently select one; hence I remained dumb. In vain did my father try to draw an answer from me by explaining the advantages I should derive from being a surgeon or chemist, a barrister or a solicitor. I could only repeat that I placed implicit confidence in his wisdom and experience. This self-denial and passive obedience appeared to touch him; I noticed it, and wishing to make a final attack on his determination, I said to him:

"Before making up my mind to any decided choice of profession, allow me to offer one observation. Are you sure that it is your trade which is impossible of extension, or is it owing to the smallness of the town in which you have carried it on? Let me follow my

own bent, I beseech you, and when I have become a good workman by your instruction, I will go to Paris and make a fortune there; I feel quite convinced I can do so."

Fearing lest he might give way, my father tried to cut the conversation short by evading a reply to my objection.

"As you leave it to me," he said, "I advise you to become a solicitor; with your natural parts, aided by application and good conduct, I am certain you will make your way famously."

Two days later I was installed in one of the best offices at Blois, and, owing to my caligraphy, I was employed as a copying clerk, and in engrossing from morning till night, though rarely understanding what I was writing. My readers can readily guess that this mechanical work could not long satisfy the turn of my mind; pens, ink, and paper were most unsuitable articles to carry out the inventive ideas which continually occurred to me. Fortunately, at that period, steel pens were unknown; hence I had a resource in making my pens, to which I devoted the best part of my time. This simple fact will suffice to give an idea of the deep spleen which weighed upon me like a coating of lead, and I should have certainly fallen ill, had I not found more attractive employment.

Among the mechanical curiosities entrusted to my father for repair, I had noticed a snuff-box, on the top of which a small piece of mechanism attracted my

entire attention. The top of the box represented a landscape. On pressing a spring, a hare made its appearance, and went towards a tuft of grass, which it began to crop; soon after a sportsman emerged from a thicket accompanied by a pointer. The miniature Nimrod stopped at the sight of the game, shouldered his gun and fired; a noise indicative of the explosion of a fire-arm was heard, and the hare, apparently wounded, disappeared in the thicket, pursued by the dog.

This pretty piece of mechanism excited my desires in an eminent degree, but I could not hope to possess it, as the owner, in addition to the value he attached to it, had no reason to dispose of it, and, besides, my pecuniary means were insufficient. As I could not make the article my own, I determined, at least, to keep it in remembrance, and drew a careful plan of it without my father's knowledge. This only more inflamed my desires, and I began to ask myself whether I could not make an exact copy of it.

Seeing no extreme difficulty in this, I rose at daybreak each morning, and, going down to my father's workshop, I worked till the hour when he used to begin work. Then I rearranged the tools exactly as I had found them, locked up my work carefully, and proceeded to my office. The joy I experienced in finding my mechanism act was only equalled by the pleasure I felt in presenting it to my father, as an indirect and respectful protest against the determination he had

formed as to my choice of a trade. I had some difficulty in persuading him that I had not been assisted by any one in my work, but when at last I removed his doubts, he could not refrain from complimenting me.

"It is a pity," he said, thoughtfully, "that you cannot profit by your turn for mechanism; but," he added, suddenly, as if seeking to dispel an idea that troubled him, "you had better take no pride in your skill, for it may injure your prospects."

For more than a year I performed the duties of amateur—that is, unpaid clerk—and I was then offered a situation by a country solicitor as second clerk, with a small salary. I accepted this unexpected promotion very readily; but, once installed in my new duties, I found that my employer had deceived me as to their range. The situation I occupied was that of office-boy, having to run on errands, for the first and only clerk could more than attend to the business. I certainly earned some money: it was the first I had gained by my own labour, and this consideration gilded the pill, which was rather bitter to my pride. Besides, M. Roger (such was my new master's name) was certainly the best fellow in the world. His manner, full of kindness and sympathy, had attracted me the first time I saw him, and I may add that his behaviour towards me was most agreeable during the time I remained in his office.

This gentleman, the personification of probity, possessed the confidence of the Duc d'Avaray, whose

estate he managed, and being full of zeal for his noble client's business, he devoted more attention to it than to his office. At Avaray legal business was very scarce, and we had hardly enough to fill up our time. For my own part, I had many leisure hours, which my kind master enabled me to employ by placing his library at my service. I had the good fortune to find in it Linnæus's Treaty on Botany, and I learned the rudiments of that science.

The study of botany required time, and I could only devote to it the hours prior to the office opening. Unfortunately, I had become a tremendous sleeper—I hardly know how—and I could not manage to get up before eight o'clock. I resolved to conquer this obstinate somnolency, and I invented a waking apparatus, which, from its originality, deserves honourable mention here.

The room I occupied formed a portion of the Château d'Avaray, and was situated over an archway, closed by a heavy gate. Having noticed that the porter opened this gate, which led into the gardens, every morning, the idea occurred to me of profiting by this circumstance to institute an energetic alarum. This is how I managed it: When I went to bed, I fastened to one of my legs the end of a cord, which, passing through my half-opened window, was attached to the upper part of the iron gate. When the porter pushed the gate open, he dragged me, when least expecting it, to the middle of my bedroom. Thus violently roused from sleep, I

tried to hold on by the bedclothes; but the more I resisted, the more did the pitiless porter push on his side, and I at length woke up to hear him always abusing the hinges, which he determined to oil before the day was out. Then, I unloosed my leg, and, with my Linnæus in my hand, I went to interrogate Nature on her admirable secrets, the study of which caused me to spend many pleasant hours.

As much to please my father as to scrupulously fulfil my duties in my new office, I had promised to pay no more attention to mechanical inventions—for I feared their irresistible attraction—and I had religiously kept my word. There was, then, every reason to believe that I should pass through all my grades creditably, and some day, in my turn, become Maître Robert, solicitor, in some country town. But Providence, in her decrees, had traced out a very different route for me, and my stern resolutions were routed by a temptation too powerful for my courage. In our office there was, strangely enough, a magnificent aviary filled with canaries, whose song and plumage were intended to dispel the impatience of a client forced by some accident to wait. This cage being considered a portion of the office furniture, I was bound, as errand-boy, to keep it in a proper state of cleanliness, and provide the food of the denizens. This was the branch of my duties I performed with the greatest zeal: in fact, I bestowed so much care on the comfort and amusement of the birds, that they soon absorbed nearly all my time.

I began by setting up in this cage a number of mechanical tricks I had invented at college under similar circumstances. I gradually added fresh ones, and ended by making the cage a work of art and curiosity, affording considerable attraction to our visitors. At one spot was a perch, near which the sugar and the seed-glass displayed their attractions; but no sooner had the innocent canary placed its foot on the fatal perch, than a circular cage encompassed it, and it was kept a prisoner until another bird, perching on an adjoining piece of wood, set loose a spring, which delivered the captive. At another place were baths and pumps; further on was a small trough, so arranged, that the nearer the bird seemed to draw to it the further off it really was. Lastly, each denizen of the cage was obliged to earn its food by drawing forward with its beak small pasteboard carts.

The pleasure I felt in carrying out these small schemes soon made me forget I was in a lawyer's office for any other purpose than to be at the beck and call of canaries. The chief clerk drew my attention to it, and added some just remonstrances; but I had always a protest ready, and continued making daily improvements in the aviary. At length, matters reached such a point, that the supreme authority, that is to say my master in person, felt it his duty to interfere.

"Robert," he said to me, assuming an earnest tone, which he rarely employed towards his clerks, "when

you came into my office you were aware it was to devote yourself exclusively to business, and not to satisfy your own thirst for pleasure; warnings have been given you to return to your duty, and you have paid no attention to them; I am, therefore, obliged to tell you that you must either decide on giving up your mechanical fancies, or I must send you home to your father."

And the worthy Monsieur Roger stopped, as if to draw breath after the reproaches he had given me, I am sure much against his will. After a moment's silence, he reassumed his paternal tone, and said to me:

"And now, my friend, will you let me give you a piece of advice? I have studied you, and feel convinced you will never be more than a very ordinary clerk, and, consequently, a still more ordinary notary, while you might become an excellent mechanician. It would be, then, wiser for you to give up a profession in which you have such slight prospect of success, and follow that for which you evince such remarkable aptitude."

The kindly tone M. Roger assumed induced me to open my heart to him. I told him of my father's determination to keep me from his own trade, and described to him all the vexation I had felt from it.

"Your father fancied he was acting for the best," he replied to me, "by putting you in a profession more lucrative than his own; he thought he should only

have a simple boyish fancy to overcome, but I am persuaded it is an irresistible vocation, against which you should no longer struggle. I will see your parents to-morrow, and I have no doubt I shall induce them to change their opinion about your future prospects in life."

Since I quitted my father's house he had sold his business, and had retired to a small property he had near Blois. My master went to see him as he had promised me; a long conversation ensued, and after numerous objections on both sides, the lawyer's eloquence vanquished my father's scruples, and he at length yielded.

"Well," he said, "as he absolutely desires it, let him follow my trade. And, as I cannot instruct him myself, my nephew, who is a pupil of mine, will act towards my son as I did towards him."

This news overwhelmed me with joy: it seemed as if I were entering on a new life, and the fortnight I had yet to spend at Avaray seemed to me terribly long. At length I set out for Blois, and the day after my arrival found me seated before a vice, file in hand, and receiving my first lesson in watchmaking from my relative.

CHAPTER III.

My Cousin Robert—The most important Event in my Life—How a Man becomes a Sorcerer—My first Sleight-of-Hand Feat—An utter Failure—Practising the Eye and the Hand—Curious Experiment in Prestidigitation—Monsieur Noriet—An Action more ingenious than delicate—I am poisoned—Influence of Delirium.

BEFORE speaking of my labours in the watchmaker's shop, I must introduce my readers to my new master. And, in the first place, to set myself right, I will say that my cousin Robert, as I used to call him, has been, since my first connexion with him, one of my best and dearest friends. It would be difficult, in fact, to imagine a more happy character, a heart more affectionate and devoted.

With a rare intelligence, my cousin combined other equally valuable qualities. He possessed a graceful address, which, without flattery, I may say is peculiar to our family, and he was justly considered the first watchmaker in Blois, a town which has long excelled in the horologic art.

My cousin began by teaching me how to "make filings," as my father called it, but I required no ap-

prenticeship to learn the use of tools, and hence the outset was not so painful as it is usually to novices. From the beginning of my apprenticeship I was enabled to undertake small jobs, which gained me my master's praise. Yet I would not have it supposed I was a model pupil, for I had still rife in me that spirit of investigation which drew down upon me several reprimands from my cousin, and I could not endure to confine my imagination to the ideas of another person. I was continually inventing or improving.

My whole life through, this passion—or, if you will, mania—has held sway over me. I never could fix my thoughts on any task without trying to introduce some improvement, or strike out a novel idea. But this temperament—eventually so favourable—was at this period very prejudicial to my progress. Before following my own inspirations and yielding to my fancies, I ought to have learned the secrets of my art, and, in fact, dispel all ideas which were only adapted to make me diverge from the true principles of clockmaking.

Such was the sense of the paternal observations made now and then by my cousin, and I was obliged to recognise their justice. Then I would go to work again with redoubled zeal, though groaning inwardly at the bonds that fettered my genius. In order to aid my progress and afford me relaxation, my master recommended me to study some treatises on mechanics in general, and on clockmaking in particular. As this suited my tastes exactly, I gladly assented, and I was

devoting myself passionately to this attractive study, when a circumstance, apparently most simple, suddenly decided my future life, by revealing to me a vocation whose mysterious resources must open a vast field for my inventive and fanciful ideas.

One evening I went into a bookseller's shop to buy Berthoud's "Treatise on Clockmaking," which I knew he had. The tradesman being engaged at the moment on matters more important, took down two volumes from the shelves and handed them to me without ceremony. On returning home, I sat down to peruse my treatise conscientiously, but judge of my surprise when I read on the back of one of the volumes "SCIENTIFIC AMUSEMENTS." Astonished at finding such a title on a professicnal work, I opened it impatiently, and, on running through the table of contents, my surprise was doubled on reading these strange phrases:

The way of performing tricks with the cards—How to guess a person's thoughts—To cut off a pigeon's head, to restore it to life, &c. &c.

The bookseller had made a mistake. In his haste, he had given me two volumes of the Encyclopædia instead of Berthoud. Fascinated, however, by the announcement of such marvels, I devoured the mysterious pages, and the further my reading advanced, the more I saw laid bare before me the secrets of an art for which I was unconsciously predestined.

I fear I shall be accused of exaggeration, or at least not be understood by many of my readers, when I say

that this discovery caused me the greatest joy I had ever experienced. At this moment a secret presentiment warned me that success, perhaps glory, would one day accrue to me in the apparent realisation of the marvellous and impossible, and fortunately these presentiments did not err.

The resemblance between two books, and the hurry of a bookseller, were the common-place causes of the most important event in my life.

It may be urged that different circumstances might have suggested this profession to me at a later date. It is probable; but then I should have had no time for it. Would any workman, artisan, or tradesman give up a certainty, however slight it may be, to yield to a passion which would be surely regarded as a mania? Hence my irresistible penchant for the mysterious could only be followed at this precise period of my life.

How often since have I blessed this providential error, without which I should have probably vegetated as a country watchmaker! My life would have been spent in gentle monotony; I should have been spared many sufferings, emotions, and shocks; but, on the other hand, what lively sensations, what profound delight would have been sacrificed!

I was eagerly devouring every line of the magic book which described the astounding tricks; my head was a-glow, and I at times gave way to thoughts which plunged me in ecstasy. Still the hours slipped away,

and while my mind was indulging in fanciful dreams, I did not notice that my candle had burned down in the socket. How can I describe my disappointment when it suddenly went out? It was the last candle I possessed; hence I was forced to quit the sublime realms of magic all for want of a halfpenny taper. At this instant I would have given my whole fortune, were it only for a street lamp.

I was not exactly in the dark: a dim ray entered my window from a neighbouring lamp; but, though I made every effort to read by it, I could not decipher a single word, and was obliged to retire to bed willy-nilly.

In vain I tried to sleep: the febrile excitement produced by the book prevented either sleep or rest. I went continually over the passages which had most struck me, and the interest they inspired only the more excited me. Finding it impossible to remain in bed, I repeatedly returned to the window, and while casting envious glances on the lamp, I had made up my mind to go down into the street and read by its light, when another idea occurred to me. In my impatience to realise it I did not wait to dress, but, confining my attire to what was strictly necessary, if I may so call a pair of slippers and my drawers, I took my hat in one hand, a pair of pincers in the other, and went down into the street.

Once there, I proceeded straight to the lamp; for I must confess, that in my anxiety to profit at once by

the sleight-of-hand tricks I had been studying, I intended to conjure away the oil-lamp provided by the authorities for the safety of the town. The part the hat and pincers were to play in the operation were simple enough: the latter would wrench open the little box containing the end of the cord by which the lamp was raised, and the former would act as a dark lantern, and hide the rays of light which might betray my theft.*

All prospered famously; and I was about to retire in triumph, when a miserable incident threatened to rob me of the profits of my trick. At the moment of my success a baker's man overthrew my plans by emerging from the door of his shop. I concealed myself in a doorway, and, while striving to hide the light, I waited perfectly motionless till the unlucky baker retired. But judge of my grief and terror when I saw him lean against the door and calmly smoke his pipe!

My position was growing intolerable; the cold and the fear of detection made my teeth chatter, and, to increase my despair, I soon felt the lining of my hat catch fire. There was no time for hesitation: I crushed my failure of a lantern in my hands, and thus put out the fire; but it was a dreadful sacrifice. My poor hat, the one I wore on Sundays, was smoked,

* It will be remembered that in those days French towns were lighted by a lamp suspended in the centre of the highway from a cord attached to two poles.

stained with oil, and shapeless. And while I was enduring all these torments, my tyrant continued to smoke with an air of calmness and comfort which drove me nearly mad.

It was quite plain I could not stay here till daylight; but how to escape from this critical situation? To ask the baker to keep my secret would be running a risk; while, to return home straight would betray me, for I must pass in front of him, and he would be sure to recognise me. The only chance left was to go down a side street and make a détour to reach the house. This I decided on, even at the risk of any one meeting me in my bathing attire. Without delay I took hat and lamp under my arm, for I was forced to remove the proofs of my crime, and I started off like an arrow. In my trouble, I fancied the baker was after me. I even thought I heard his footfall behind me, and in my anxiety to escape I doubled my speed; first I turned to the right, then to the left, and went through such a number of streets, that it took me a quarter of an hour to regain my room, in a state of perfect collapse, yet glad to have escaped so cheaply.

It is a painful confession for a man destined eventually to fill a certain part in the annals of conjuring to make, that my trial-piece turned out so lamentably. In fact, to use a theatrical phrase, it was an utter *fiasco*.

Still, I was not at all discouraged; the next day I regained all my equanimity on finding my precious

treatise on "White Magic" before me, and I began studying the interesting secrets it contained with great ardour.

Within a week I knew them all by heart.

From theory I resolved to proceed to practice; but, just as was the case with Carlosbach's book, I suddenly met with an obstacle. The author, I will grant, was more conscientious than the Bordelais mystifier: he gave a very plain explanation of his tricks; still, he committed the error of supposing his readers possessed of the necessary skill to perform them. Now, I was entirely deficient in this skill, and though most desirous of acquiring it, I found nothing in the book to indicate the means. I was in the position of a man who attempts to copy a picture without possessing the slightest notion of drawing and painting.

In the absence of a professor to instruct me, I was compelled to create the principles of the science I wished to study. In the first place, I recognised the fundamental principle of sleight of hand, that the organs performing the principal part are the sight and touch. I saw that, in order to attain any degree of perfection, the professor must develop these organs to their fullest extent—for, in his exhibitions, he must be able to see everything that takes place around him at half a glance, and execute his deceptions with unfailing dexterity.

I had been often struck by the ease with which pianists can read and perform at sight the most diffi-

cult pieces. I saw that, by practice, it would be possible to create a certainty of perception and facility of touch, rendering it easy for the artist to attend to several things simultaneously, while his hands were busy employed with some complicated task. This faculty I wished to acquire and apply to sleight of hand; still, as music could not afford me the necessary elements, I had recourse to the juggler's art, in which I hoped to meet with an analogous result.

It is well known that the trick with the balls wonderfully improves the touch, but does it not improve the vision at the same time? In fact, when a juggler throws into the air four balls crossing each other in various directions, he requires an extraordinary power of sight to follow the direction his hands have given to each of the balls. At this period a corn-cutter resided at Blois, who possessed the double talent of juggling and extracting corns with a skill worthy of the lightness of his hands. Still, with both these qualities, he was not rich, and being aware of that fact, I hoped to obtain lessons from him at a price suited to my modest finances. In fact, for ten francs he agreed to initiate me in the juggling art.

I practised with so much zeal, and progressed so rapidly, that in less than a month I had nothing more to learn; at least, I knew as much as my master, with the exception of corn-cutting, the monopoly in which I left him. I was able to juggle with four balls at once. But this did not satisfy my ambition; so I placed

a book before me, and, while the balls were in the air, I accustomed myself to read without any hesitation.

This will probably seem to my readers very extraordinary; but I shall surprise them still more, when I say that I have just amused myself by repeating this curious experiment. Though thirty years have elapsed since the time of which I am writing, and though I scarcely once touched my balls during that period, I can still manage to read with ease while keeping three balls up.

The practice of this trick gave my fingers a remarkable degree of delicacy and certainty, while my eye was at the same time acquiring a promptitude of perception that was quite marvellous. Presently I shall have to speak of the service this rendered me in my experiment of second sight. After having thus made my hands supple and docile, I went on straight to sleight of hand, and I more especially devoted myself to the manipulation of cards and palmistry.

This operation requires a great deal of practice; for, while the hand is held apparently open, balls, corks, lumps of sugar, coins, &c., must be held unseen, the fingers remaining perfectly free and limber.

Owing to the little time at my disposal, the difficulties connected with these new experiments would have been insurmountable, had I not found a mode of practising without neglecting my business. It was the fashion in those days to wear coats with large pockets on the hips, called *à la propriétaire*, so when-

ever my hands were not otherwise engaged they slipped naturally into my pockets, and set to work with cards, coins, or one of the objects I have mentioned. It will be easily understood how much time I gained by this. Thus, for instance, when out on errands my hands could be at work on both sides; at dinner, I often ate my soup with one hand while I was learning to *sauter la coupe* with the other—in short, the slightest moment of relaxation was devoted to my favourite pursuit. As no one suspected that my paletôt was in some degree a study, this manner of keeping my hands in my pockets began to be regarded as a bad habit I had acquired; but after a few jests on the subject I was left in peace.

Though my passion for sleight of hand was so intense, I had, however, sufficient command over myself not to displease my master, who never noticed that my thoughts were away from my work, and constantly praised me for my regularity and application.

At length my apprenticeship was over, and my cousin, one fine day, stated I was a journeyman and able to earn wages. I heard this with double pleasure, for I found in it not only greater liberty, but also a chance of improving my finances. Nor was I long ere I profited by my advancement; a situation was offered me by a watchmaker at Tours, and I proceeded to that town at once.

My new master was that M. Noriet, who afterwards gained some distinction as a sculptor. His imagina-

tion, already full of his future works, disdained the ordinary labour of watch repairing, and he gladly left to his workmen what he called, ironically, the "shoe-black" part of the trade. It was for this purpose I joined him, and I received, in addition to board and lodging, 35 fr. a month. Little enough, I grant; but it was an enormous sum in my eyes, for, since leaving the lawyer's, at Avaray, my income had been reduced to a *minimum*.

When I say I earned 35 fr., it is merely to mention a round sum; in reality I never received it net. Madame Noriet, in her quality of an excellent manager, was perfectly conversant with all matters relative to discount and exchanges; and thus, she had found a way of lessening my wages in a manner as ingenious as it was improper. She used to pay me in crowns of six francs, and as at that time six-franc pieces were only worth 5 fr. 80 c., the lady gained 24 sous every month, which I carried to my "profit and loss" account.

Although my time was fully occupied here, I managed to continue my pocket practice; and I daily noticed with joy the progress I was making. I had learned how to make any object I held in my hand disappear with the greatest ease; and as for the practice of card tricks, they were only child's play to me, and I could produce some delightful illusions.

I confess to feeling a degree of pride in my humble power of amusing my friends, and I neglected no occa-

sion of displaying it. On Sunday, for instance, after the invariable game of loto, which was played in this patriarchal family, I gave a small performance of sleight of hand, which enlivened the melancholy victims of this most monotonous of all games. I was honoured with the name of an "agreeable droll," and this compliment delighted me.

My regular habits, my perseverance, and perhaps a certain degree of gaiety I possessed at the time, had gained me the friendship and sympathy of both my master and mistress. At last I became an indispensable member of the family, and shared in all their amusements. Among these were frequent excursions in the country. On one of these, on the 25th of July, 1828 (I shall never forget that memorable date, as it was all but registered on my tombstone), we went to a fair at an adjacent village. Before leaving Tours, we had promised to be home to dinner at five; but, finding ourselves much amused, we did not keep military time, nor found our way home till eight.

After enduring the scolding of the cook, whose dinner had got cold, we sat down and ate like people whose appetite has been whetted by a long walk in the open air, and eight or ten hours' fasting.

Whatever Jeannette might say, everything she sent up was found excellent, except a certain ragoût, which everybody declared detestable, and hardly touched. I, however, devoured my share of the dish, without troubling myself the least in the world about its quality.

In spite of the jests aroused by my avidity, I asked for a second relay, and would certainly have eaten the whole dish, had not my mistress, with due regard for my health, prevented it.

This precaution saved my life. In fact, dinner was hardly over and the game of loto begun, when I felt most uncomfortable. I went to my room, where atrocious pains seized upon me, and a doctor was sent for. After a careful investigation, the doctor discovered that a powerful layer of verdigris had formed in the stewpan in which the ragoût had been cooked and said I was poisoned.

The consequences of this poisoning were most terrible to me: for some time my life was despaired of, but eventually the sufferings seemed to be modified by the gentle care bestowed on me, and I was granted some slight relief. Strangely enough, it was not till this second phase of my illness, when the doctor declared me out of danger, that I was haunted by a certainty of speedy death, to which was joined an immoderate desire to end my days in the bosom of my family. This idea—a species of monomania—incessantly assailed me, and I soon had no other thought than that of escaping to Blois. As I could not hope to obtain the doctor's permission to set out, when his most urgent advice was to take care of myself, I determined to take leave.

At six o'clock one morning, taking advantage of a moment when I was left to myself, I hastily dressed,

went down stairs, and found a stage-coach just starting for Blois. I entered the rotonde, in which I happened to be the only passenger, and the coach, lightly laden as it was, soon set off at full gallop.

The journey was a horrible martyrdom to me. I was devoured by a burning fever, and my head seemed to be burst asunder by every jolt of the vehicle. In my frenzy I tried to escape my agony, and yet it was continually increasing. Unable to endure longer, I opened the door of the compartment, and leaped, at an imminent risk of my life, on to the high road, where I fell in a state of insensibility.

I cannot say what happened to me after my fainting fit; I can only remember long days of vague and painful existence, that appeared of eternal duration: I was in a raging fever; my dreams were frightful, and I suffered from the most dreadful hallucinations. One of them was incessantly recurring—it seemed as if my head opened like a snuff-box; a doctor, with turned-up cuffs, and armed with an enormous pair of iron pincers, drew from my brain roasted chesnuts, which immediately burst like bombs, and scattered myriads of scintillations before my eyes.

This phantasmagoria gradually faded away, and the illness at length succumbed; but my reason was so shaken that it did not avail me. I was reduced to a mechanical existence. If I noticed anything, it seemed veiled in a thick mist, and I could not perform any process of reasoning. It is true that all I did notice

only served to increase the confusion of my ideas. I felt as if being shaken in a carriage, and, yet, I was in a capital bed, and the room was exquisitely clean. How could I help fancying I was still dreaming ?

At length, a spark of intelligence was aroused in me, and the first startling impression was produced by the sight of a man standing at my bedside. His features were quite strange to me. Stooping over, he affectionately urged me to swallow a draught. I obeyed; and he then begged me to keep silent, and remain as calm as I possibly could.

Unfortunately, my present state of weakness rendered it but too easy to follow this prescription. Still, I tried to guess who this man could be, and consulted my memory. It was quite useless: I could remember nothing since the moment when, yielding to frenzy, I had thrown myself out of the diligence.

CHAPTER IV.

I return to Life—A strange Doctor—Torrini and Antonio: a Conjuror and a Fanatic for Music—A Murderer's Confession—A perambulating House—The Fair at Angers—A portable Theatre—I witness for the first Time a Conjuring Performance—The blind Man's Game at Piquet—A dangerous Rival—Signor Castelli eats a Man alive.

I AM by no means a fatalist; and yet I cannot refrain from remarking here that many events in human life seem to encourage the views of fatalists.

Suppose, dear reader, that, on leaving Blois to proceed to Tours, destiny had opened before me one of the fairest pages of my life, I should certainly have been delighted at such a glorious future, but in my heart I should have been inclined to doubt its realisation. In fact, I set out as a simple workman, with the intention of making a tour of France. This journey would have occupied much time, as I intended to remain a year or two in every city I visited, and France is large! Then, when I considered myself skilful enough, I would return home and set up as a watchmaker.

But fate decided otherwise, and I must be drawn

back to my real "groove" when I tried to escape from it. The means employed were a poisoning, which turned me mad, and hurled me lifeless on the high road. But I was going to recal my reminiscences after my *fortunate* catastrophe, and I will take up the story from the point where I left off.

What had happened since my fainting fit; where was I; why did this man treat me so kindly? I longed for a solution of these problems, and I should certainly have cross-questioned my host, had it not been for the earnest advice he had just given me. As thought, however, was not forbidden, I tried to form a satisfactory conclusion from surrounding objects.

The room I was in might be three yards long by two broad. The walls were made of polished oak; on either side was a small window with muslin curtains; while four walnut chairs, shelves serving as tables, and my excellent bed, composed the furniture of this moving room, which bore a close resemblance to the cabin of a steam-boat.

There must also be two other compartments, for, to my left, I saw my doctor frequently disappear behind two red damask curtains, where I heard him moving about, while to my right I heard, through a thin partition, a voice encouraging the horses. This circumstance made me conclude I was in a carriage, and that the latter voice belonged to the driver.

I already knew that hero's name, as I had often heard the person I presumed to be his master use it. It

was Antonio: and he was, at any rate, a splendid musician, for he was continually singing pieces from Italian operas, which he broke off to swear harmlessly at his steeds. As for the master, he was a man of about fifty, above the average height, and his face, though sad and serious, displayed a degree of kindness which prepossessed me. His long black hair fell on his shoulders in natural curls, and he was dressed in a blouse and trousers of unbleached cloth, with a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief as cravat. But nothing in all this served to tell me what he was, and my surprise was increased by finding him constantly at my side, and nursing me like the fondest of mothers.

A day had elapsed since his recommendation to keep silent; I had gained a little strength, and fancied myself strong enough to talk; I was, therefore, going to begin, when my host, guessing my intention, prevented me.

"I can imagine," he said, "your impatience to know where you are and whom with; nor, will I conceal from you that I am equally curious to learn the circumstances that led to our meeting. Still, in regard for your health, the responsibility of which I have assumed, I must ask you to be patient for one night more; to-morrow, I believe, we shall be able to talk as long as you like, without any risk."

As I had no serious objection to raise, and as I had been wont for some time to obey all my strange doctor ordered, I yielded. The certainty of soon holding the

key to the enigma secured me a peaceful sleep, whose good effects I noticed on waking. Thus, when the doctor came to feel my pulse, he was surprised at the progress I had made in a few hours, and, without awaiting my questions, he said, as if replying to the mute inquiry my eyes made:

"Yes, I will satisfy your just curiosity; I owe you an explanation, and you shall not wait any longer. My name is Torrini, and I am a conjuror by profession. You are in my house—that is, in the carriage I usually employ as my domicile. You will be surprised, I dare say, to learn that the bedroom you now occupy can be lengthened into a theatre, and in that room behind the red curtains is the stage on which my apparatus is arranged."

At the word "conjuror" I could not repress a start of satisfaction, which my sorcerer probably did not notice, ignorant as he was that he had before him one of the most fervent adepts of his profession.

"As for yourself," he went on, "I need not ask you any questions: your name, trade, as well as the cause of your illness, are known to me, for I consulted your *livret*, and some letters I found on you, in my desire to benefit you. I must now tell you, though, all that has happened since you lost consciousness. After giving some representations at Orleans, I was proceeding to Angers, where the fair will shortly begin, when, at some distance from Amboise, I found you lying insensible, with your face to the ground. Fortunately

for you, I was then taking my morning walk by the horses' side, and this circumstance saved you being run over. By Antonio's help I carried you to my bed, and my knowledge of medicine restored you to life. But my poor fellow! the fever caused you to make the most terrible outbreaks; you threatened me continually, and I had the greatest difficulty in mastering you. At Tours I would have gladly stopped to call in a doctor, for your situation was critical, and I had not practised for many years:—but my hours were counted: I must arrive in time at Angers, where I wish to choose a good spot for my exhibition, and I had a strange fancy I should save your life, which has proved true."

Not knowing how to thank this excellent Torrini, I offered him my hand, which he pressed firmly; but—must I confess it—I was checked in the effusion of my gratitude by a thought which I deeply regretted later.

"To what motive," I asked myself, "can I attribute this sudden affection?" This feeling, however sincere it might be, must have some cause, and in my ingratitude I sought whether my benefactor did not conceal some interested design behind his apparent generosity. Torrini, as if he had guessed my thoughts, continued, in a kindly tone:

"You expect a fuller explanation? Well, however painful it may be to me, I will give it. It is this—

"You are surprised that a mountebank, a man be-

longing to a class not generally erring on the side of sensibility, should have evinced such compassion for your sufferings, but your surprise will cease, my boy, on learning that this compassion is produced by the sweet illusion of paternal love."

Here Torrini stopped an instant, tried to recover himself, and then proceeded :

"I had a son, a beloved son ; he was my hope, my life, my happiness; but a dread fatality robbed me of him: he died, and, terrible to say, he was assassinated, and his murderer stands before you!"

At this unexpected confession I could not repress a start of horror ; the cold drops beaded on my face.

"Yes, yes, his murderer!" Torrini went on, his voice growing gradually firmer, "and, yet, the law could not punish me ; it left me life. In vain I accused myself before my judges ; they treated me as a maniac, and my crime was regarded as accidental homicide. But what do I care, after all, for their judgment ? Whether through carelessness, or imprudence as they say, my poor Giovanni is not the less lost to me, and I shall reproach myself with his death my life long."

Torrini's voice was drowned by his sobs. He remained for some time with his hands before his eyes; then, making an effort, he continued, in a calmer tone :

"To spare you emotions that might prove dangerous in your present state, I will abridge the narrative of

the misfortunes to which this event was only a terrible prelude. What I have said will suffice to explain the natural cause of my sympathy towards you. When I first saw you, I was struck by the likeness you bore in age and height to my unhappy boy. I even fancied I could trace a certain resemblance in your face, and, yielding to this illusion, I decided on keeping you near me, and nursing you as if you were my own child. You can now form an idea of the agony I endured during the week when I was compelled to despair of your restoration to life. But Providence, taking pity on us both, has saved you. You are now quite convalescent, and in a few days, I trust, will be perfectly recovered. Such, my boy, is the secret of the affection I displayed towards you."

Deeply moved by the father's misfortunes, and touched by the tender care he had bestowed on me, I could only express my gratitude in half-broken phrases, for I was almost stifled by emotion. Torrini, also feeling the necessity of shortening this painful interview, went out, promising to return soon.

No sooner was I alone than a thousand thoughts crossed my mind. This mysterious and tragical event, the thought of which seemed to overthrow Torrini's reason; this crime of which he accused himself so persistently; this verdict whose justice he disputed, perplexed me in the highest degree, and gave me a great desire to obtain more complete details about this domestic drama. Then, I asked myself how a

man possessing so agreeable a countenance, who did not lack either judgment or talent, and who joined to a solid education a readiness of conversation and distinguished manners, could have thus sunk to the lowest stage of his profession.

While absorbed in these thoughts, the vehicle stopped: we had arrived at Angers. Torrini left us, in order to obtain the mayor's leave to perform, and so soon as he had succeeded, he prepared to occupy the spot allotted to him. As I have already stated, the room I occupied was to be transformed into a theatre; hence, I was carried to an adjacent inn, and placed in a capital arm-chair close to an open window. The weather was glorious; the sun's beneficent rays seemed to impart fresh life to me, and I began to lose that egotistic indifference which a lengthened illness usually produces.

I could see Antonio and his master, with their sleeves tucked up, working at the theatre. In a few hours our residence was completely transformed; the moving house had become a charming room. The arrangement of this singular vehicle is so stamped on my memory, that I can still supply an exact description of it, and I will fill up the details I have already given of it.

The bed on which I had lain was drawn up through a trap in the ceiling, where it occupied a very small space. If clothes or linen were required, an adjoining trap was opened, and, by means of a ring, a chest of

drawers was produced, as if by magic. A similar process revealed a small chimney, which, by a peculiar arrangement, expelled the smoke below the hearth. Lastly, the larder, cooking-range, and other accessories of the household, were ready to hand, and could be easily restored to their respective places. This strange furniture occupied all the space between the wheels, so that the room, though amply furnished, was not crowded.

But I was most surprised to see the vehicle, which was scarcely six yards long, suddenly grow twice that length. This was most ingeniously contrived: the body was double, and could be pulled out like a telescope. This prolongation, supported by trestles, was quite as secure as the rest of the edifice. The partition, dividing the rooms off, had been removed, so that they now formed but a single apartment. The public entered on this side, and a staircase led to the door, before which an elegant marquee formed a vestibule, where the tickets were issued. Lastly, a scaffolding was erected over the front, which represented a stuccoed house.

The sight of this machine excited my imagination, and I built castles in the air which I was never to inhabit. I, too, would have a similar vehicle, though rather smaller, as my exhibition would be different.

Here I must make room for a parenthesis, to supply an explanation I think necessary. I have spoken so much of sleight of hand, that it might be supposed

I had quite given up all thoughts about mechanism. On the contrary, I still passionately loved that science; but I had modified its application, since the love of the marvellous had inflamed my imagination. I proposed to call to my aid automata, which I would eventually build; then, I would traverse the whole of Europe, perhaps the world, gaining an ample amount of honour, pleasure, and profit.

While engaged with these pleasant dreams I regained my health and strength, and hoped that Torrini would soon allow me to be present at one of his performances. In fact, he soon offered me an agreeable surprise, for, one evening, he led me to his theatre, and installed me on the first row of seats, grandly denominated "the stalls." Judging by my own enthusiasm, I expected the theatre would be thronged so soon as the doors opened, but, to my great surprise and regret, the room was not more than half full.

The hour fixed for commencing at length arrived; the bell rang thrice, the curtains were drawn back, and an exquisite little stage was visible. The most striking thing was the entire absence of all that apparatus by which many performers compensate for their lack of skill, while, by a graceful innovation, a few candles, artistically arranged, were substituted for that dazzling glare which, at the period of which I write, was the indispensable ornament of all performances of "amusing science."

Torrini appeared, walked towards the public with great ease of manner, made a deep bow, then demanded the indulgence of the spectators, and ended by paying a compliment to the ladies. This slight address, though uttered in a cold and melancholy tone, received a few encouraging bravos from the audience.

The performance commenced in the most perfect silence; everybody seemed inclined to devote all attention to it. I could hardly breathe, in my desire not to lose a single word or gesture.

I will not describe the several tricks I saw; they all possessed extraordinary interest for me; but Torrini appeared to excel in card tricks. He possessed two most precious qualities in the exercise of this art: these were extreme skill and an incredible boldness of execution. To these he added a most aristocratic way of touching the cards; his white and carefully-tended hands seemed hardly to rest on them, and his tricks were so artistically performed that the audience involuntarily bestowed a sympathising confidence upon him. Sure of the effect he would produce, he performed the most difficult "passes," with a coolness no one could expect him to possess; and this produced the most successful results. To close the performances, Torrini requested the audience to choose some one to play a game of piquet with him, and a gentleman immediately stepped on the stage.

"Pardon me, sir," said Torrini, "but it is indis-

pensable, for the success of the experiment, that I should know your name and profession."

"Nothing easier, sir. My name is Joseph Lenoir, at your service; and my profession is that of dancing-master."

Any other than Torrini would have made some jest on the name and profession of this rival of Vestris; but he did nothing of the sort. He had only asked this question to gain time, for he never indulged in any mystification; so he merely added:

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness; and now we know who we are, we can place confidence in each other. You have come to play a game of piquet with me; but do you understand the game thoroughly?"

"I flatter myself I do, sir."

"Ah! ah!" Torrini said, with a laugh. "Pray do not flatter yourself till we have played our game. Still, not to lower your self-esteem, I will allow you to be an excellent player; but that will not prevent you losing the game, although the chances are all in your favour. Listen to me carefully; the trick I am going to perform, and which is called the 'blind man's game of piquet,' requires that I should be blinded, so have the goodness to bandage my eyes carefully."

M. Lenoir, who, I may mention, wore spectacles, was very distrustful, hence he took extraordinary precautions to accomplish his task. First, he covered the patient's eyes with tow, over which he fastened three thick bandages; and, as if this fourfold covering were

not enough to blind his opponent, he fastened an enormous shawl round his head. I know not how Torrini kept from suffocation beneath these heavy bandages; for my part, the perspiration ran down my face at seeing him so muffled up. Not knowing all the resources this skilful performer had at command, I was rather fearful as to the result of the experiment, and my alarm reached its climax when I heard him address his opponent as follows:

"Monsieur Lenoir, have the kindness to sit down opposite me at this table. I have still a small service to ask you before we begin our game. You have quite deprived me of my sight, but that is not enough. You have now to bind my hands, so that I may be quite incapable."

M. Lenoir raised his spectacles and looked at Torrini, as if stupified; but the latter, quietly placing his arms on the table, and crossing his thumbs, said, "Now, sir, fasten them securely."

The dancing-master took the piece of whipcord and performed his task as conscientiously as he had done the first part.

"Am I now blinded, and deprived of the use of my hands?" Torrini asked his vis-à-vis.

"I am certain of it," Joseph Lenoir replied.

"Well, then, to begin our game. But tell me first in what suit you would like to be repiqued?"

"In clubs."

"Very good; now deal the cards by twos or threes,

as you please. When they are dealt out, I will leave you to select the hand you think will enable you best to prevent a repique."

All the time these explanations and preparations lasted, the audience remained motionless and silent, not knowing whether a mystification or a real trick were intended. Now, on seeing the dancing-master shuffle the cards, there could be no further doubt; hence all rose to command a view of the stage, and a great number of spectators even surrounded the table. I had also drawn near, and, to my great delight, secured a front place.

Profound silence in the room.

"The cards are shuffled, please to cut!" the dancing-master said, in an ironical tone, as if secure of victory.

"Willingly," Torrini replied. And though hampered in his movements, he soon satisfied his opponent.

The cards having been dealt, M. Lenoir decided on keeping those before him.

"Very good!" said Torrini. "You wished, I think, to be repiqued in clubs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now follow my play. I throw out the sevens of spades, hearts, and diamonds, and my two eights; the cards I take in give me a quint in clubs, fourteen in queens, and fourteen in kings, with which I repique you. Pray count and verify, sir."

Torrini spoke the truth. Hearty shouts of applause

greeted his success, while jokes were cut at the expense of the poor dancing-master, who hurried from the stage in a state of pitiable confusion.

The performance over, I expressed to Torrini the pleasure his tricks caused me, and paid him some sincere compliments on the skill he had evinced during the whole evening, and specially in his last trick.

"These compliments are the more flattering," he replied, with a smile, "as I know now they are paid me, if not by a fellow-artist, at least by an amateur, who, I am certain, already possesses some degree of skill in the profession."

I know not which of us, Torrini or myself, was the more charmed by the compliments we exchanged; at any rate, I felt most sensibly the favourable opinion he had formed of my talents. One thing, however, perplexed me: I had never said a word to Torrini about my sleight-of-hand fancies: how could he have found them out?

He read my thoughts, and added:

"You are surprised at my detecting your secret? and you would like to know how I did so. I am happy to tell you. My room is small; hence it is easy for me, when on the stage, to look at every face, and judge the various impressions I produce on the spectators. I observed you particularly, and while watching the direction of your eyes, I could judge what was passing in your mind. Thus, when I indulged in some

amusing paradox, to draw public attention away from the side where the trick was to be performed, you alone escaped the snare, and kept your eyes fixed on the right spot. As for my piquet trick, though I could not observe you while I was performing it, I have reasons to be assured that you did not know it."

"You have guessed perfectly right, my dear magician, and I cannot deny that in my leisure hours I have amused myself with some of these tricks, for which I always felt great inclination."

"Inclination! Allow me to say that is not the proper word in your case, my dear lad; yours is a true passion. I base my opinion on the following observations. This evening, from the moment of the curtain rising, your searching eye, your agitated face and half-parted lips, denoted the state of excitement you were in. You looked like a gourmet just sitting down to a well-covered board, or a miser gloating over his treasure. Do you think that with these signs I need be a sorcerer to discover the sway conjuring exercises over your mind?"

I was about to reply, when Torrini drew out his watch, and said to me, "Come, young gentleman, it is growing late; it is high time for a convalescent to seek his rest. We will continue our conversation at a better time."

With these words my doctor led me to my room, and, after counting my pulse, which appeared to satisfy him, retired. In spite of the pleasure I felt in talking,

I was not ill-pleased to find myself alone, for I had a thousand souvenirs to evoke. I wished to summon up again the experiments that had struck me most, but it was all in vain. One thought mastered all the rest, and produced a strange sinking in my heart. I tried, without success, to explain the motives why the public neglected Torrini's interesting performances.

This motive Antonio explained to me afterwards, and it is too curious to be passed by in silence. Besides, I have here an opportunity to introduce my readers to a very remarkable specimen of the great family of mountebanks.

I have said that we reached Angers at fair time; and among the numerous providers of amusement who solicited the presence and money of the Angevins, was another conjuror, known as Castelli.

He was no more an Italian than was Torrini. I shall presently give Torrini's real name, and the reasons that caused him to change it for the one we know him by; as for the other conjuror, he was a Norman by birth, and only assumed the name of Castelli in conformity with the custom of most conjurors of the day, who thought an Italian name more attractive.

Castelli was far from possessing Torrini's marvellous address, and his performances offered no special interest as far as sleight of hand was concerned; but he thought with Figaro that "skill was better than learning," and he proved it by his repeated successes. In truth, this man was the incarnation of charlatanism, and he spared

nothing to pique public curiosity. Each day some new prodigy was announced on his enormous posters. It was in reality only a deception, very often a mystification for the audience; but his treasury was always filled to repletion—hence, the trick was good. If the public felt wroth at being duped, Castelli knew the art of escaping from the dilemma and drawing the laughers on his side; he boldly made some jest in bad Italian, at which the pit could not help laughing, and was thus disarmed.

Besides, it must be remembered that, at this period, conjuring was not so respectable as it is now; people went to an exhibition of that sort to laugh at the conjuror's victims, even if themselves exposed to his attacks. My readers ought to have seen the mystifier *par excellence*, the celebrated physico-ventriloquist of the age, Comte, to form an idea of the cool way in which the public was then treated. This performer, though so graceful and gallant towards ladies, was merciless to men. According to his notions, the cavaliers (as they were then called) were predestined to supply amusement for the fair sex——But I must not poach on the biography of the "natural philosopher to the king," which will hereafter find a place in my volumes.

The same day on which I had witnessed Torrini's performance, Castelli's bills contained an astounding statement, well adapted, I grant, to tempt public curiosity. The professor pledged himself to eat a man alive, and if he did not succeed to the satisfaction of

his audience, he would hand over all the receipts to the mayor for distribution among the poor. This seductive appeal had drawn the whole town; crowds collected round the show, and persons who arrived too late were glad to pay double entrance money. But the new trick played by the conjuror was quite worthy of all that had preceded it.

Castelli, after performing several tricks of second-rate interest, at length arrived at the one which caused even the calmest spectator to throb with impatience.

"Gentlemen," he then said, addressing the audience, "we will now proceed to the last trick. I promised to eat a man alive for my supper, and I will keep my word. Will the courageous spectator who wishes to serve as a repast to me (Castelli pronounced this word with the expression of a perfect cannibal), take the trouble to mount on the stage?"

Two victims immediately presented themselves. By accident they offered a perfect contrast, and Castelli, who understood the art of producing an effect, skilfully profited by it. He placed them side by side, with their faces turned to the audience, then after surveying one of them, a tall, bilious-looking fellow, from head to foot, he said to him, with affected politeness,

"I do not wish to insult you, sir, but I am sorry to tell you that, as regards my food, I am quite of M. le Curé's opinion—you understand me?"

The tall, thin man appeared for a moment as if trying to guess a riddle, and ended by scratching his ear,

—a gesture which, among all nations, civilised or barbarous, signifies, "I do not understand."

"I will explain, then," Castelli continued. "You know that M. le Curé does not like bones; at least, so they say at forfeits, and I assure you I share the curé's antipathy in this respect. You can retire, then; I will not detain you." And Castelli began bowing to his visitor, who hastened back to his seat.

"Now, then, for us two," the conjuror said, turning to the one who remained. He was a tall, chubby fellow, with rosy cheeks, who seemed purposely made for the repast of an epicurean cannibal.

"Well, my stout friend, so you consent to be eaten alive?"

"Yes, sir, I am quite willing, and came here for that purpose."

"Ah! ah! that is capital!" (Here Castelli licked his lips like a gourmet, whose mouth waters at the sight of a dainty dish.) "As I have a powerful appetite, we will begin directly."

At this moment a gigantic cruet-stand was brought in. The stout youth regarded it with surprise, as if trying to discover the use of this strange utensil.

"Don't mind it, pray!" said Castelli. "I am very fond of hot dishes, so allow me to pepper and salt you in my usual fashion."

And he began covering the unhappy man with a white powder, which, adhering to his hair, face, and clothes, soon gave him an extraordinary appearance.

The stout youth, who at the beginning had tried to rival the conjuror's gaiety, did not laugh now, and seemed earnestly to desire the end of the jest.

"Now, then!" Castelli added, rolling his eyes about ferociously, "kneel down, and hold your hands over your head. Very good, my friend: it really looks as if you had never followed any other trade than being eaten alive. Now, then, say your prayers, and I will begin. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," the stout lad muttered, turning quite yellow with emotion, "I am ready."

Castelli then took the end of the patient's thumb in his mouth, and bit it so hard that the latter, as if working by a spring, jumped up, shouting energetically,

"Confound it, sir, take care; you hurt me!"

"What! I hurt you?" Castelli said, with perfect calmness. "What will you say, then, when I reach your head? It was really absurd of you to cry out like a baby at the first mouthful. Come, be reasonable: let me go on. I am frightfully hungry, and long for my supper."

And Castelli, thrusting him by the shoulders, tried to make him take his first position. But the young man resisted with all his strength, as he cried, in a voice palsied with fear, "I won't have it: I tell you I won't have it. You hurt me too much!" At length, by a supreme effort, he escaped from his tormentor's hands. During this time the audience, foreseeing the result of this amusing scene, had been shouting with

laughter, and Castelli found some difficulty in gaining a hearing.

"Gentlemen!" he said, assuming a tone of the deepest disappointment, "you see me both surprised and vexed at the flight of that gentleman, who had not the courage to allow himself to be eaten. Now, I expect some one to take his place; for, far from shunning the performance of my promise, I feel so comfortable, that I pledge myself, after eating the first spectator who offers, to eat the second, and so on. Indeed, to prove myself worthy your applause, I promise to eat the whole roomful."

This jest was greeted by another hearty laugh, but the farce was played out. No one came forward to be eaten, and the crowd went home to digest the trick played on them all.

If such manœuvres could succeed, few spectators were left for Torrini. As he desired to maintain a certain dignity, he never announced tricks he did not perform, and, even if trying to render the titles attractive, he always adhered to the strictest truth.

CHAPTER V.

Antonio's Confessions — How to gain Public Applause — The Count de ——, Mountebank—I repair an Automaton—A Mechanician's Shop on Wheels—Nomadic Life—Happy Existence—Torrini's Lessons—His Opinions about Sleight of Hand—A fashionable Greek, Victim of his own Swindling—The Conjuror Comus—A Duel at Piquet — Torrini proclaimed Conqueror—Revelations—New Catastrophe—Poor Torrini!

THE day after the performances, Antonio came as usual to inquire after my health. I have already said this young man possessed a charming character: ever gay, ever singing, his fund of good humour was inexhaustible, and frequently produced a degree of gaiety in our house, which otherwise would have been very gloomy. On opening my door, he stopped the operatic air he had been humming from the bottom of the stairs.

"Well, my little signor," he said, in French, picturesquely intermingled with Italian, "how is the health this morning?"

"Famous, Antonio—famous, thank you!"

"Oh yes! famous, Antonio, famous!" and the Italian sought to repeat the intonation of my voice. "I believe you, my dear patient, but that will not prevent you taking this draught the doctor, my master, has sent you."

"I am willing; but, indeed, this medicine is becoming unnecessary, for I now feel that I shall soon be restored to health, and then I shall only have to thank you and your master for your attention to me, and pay him the expenses caused by my illness."

"What are you talking about?" Antonio said. "Do you think of leaving us? Oh, I hope not."

"You are right, Antonio; I am not thinking of it to-day, but I must consider of it so soon as I am in a condition to leave. You must see, my friend, that, in spite of all the pain our separation will cause me, I must make up my mind to it before long, for I am anxious to return to Blois and reassure my family, who must feel most uncomfortable about me."

"Your family cannot be uncomfortable, as, in order to calm your father, you wrote to him that your illness, having had no dangerous results, you had proceeded to Angers to look for work."

"It is true, but——"

"But, but," Antonio interrupted me, "you have no good reason to offer. I repeat, you cannot quit us. Besides," he added, lowering his voice, "if I told you something, I am sure you would be of my opinion."

Antonio stopped, appeared to struggle for a moment

against the desire he felt to confide in me, then, making up his mind, said, resolutely, "Ah, bah! as it is necessary, I cannot hesitate. You were talking just now about paying my master. Do you know that he is, I fancy, in your debt?"

"I do not understand you."

"Well, listen to me, my dear friend," Antonio said, with a mysterious air; "I will explain myself. You are not ignorant that our poor Torrini is afflicted by a very grave malady that touches him here (and Antonio laid his hand on his forehead); now, since you have been with us, and he fancies he can trace some resemblance to his son, my master is gradually losing his sorrow, and even indulges in gaiety now and then. Yesterday, for instance, during his performance, you saw him make his audience laugh twice or thrice, which has not occurred for a long time.

"Ah, my dear sir," Antonio continued, growing more and more communicative, "if you had seen him before that fatal event, when he performed in the first theatres of Italy. What enthusiasm! what spirit! Who could have foretold at that period that Count de" — here Antonio checked himself — "that the celebrated Torrini would ever be reduced to play in a barn as the rival of the lowest mountebanks—he, the inimitable sorcerer, the honoured artist, everywhere known as the handsome, the elegant Torrini! However, it was only just; for he eclipsed the richest professors by his luxury and distinguished manners, and

never did a performer more fully deserve legitimate applause for his talent and address.

"However, I must confess," Antonio added, carried away by his confessions, "that this applause was sometimes my handiwork. Doubtlessly the public appreciates talent with intelligence, but it often requires to be guided in the outburst of its admiration. I took charge of this duty, and without saying a word to my master, I prepared him several ovations which extended and prolonged his success. How many times bouquets, thrown at the right moment, excited the applause of the entire audience? how many times murmurs of approval, skilfully introduced, aroused the enthusiasm of the theatre? What successes, my dear fellow—what successes we had, though, in those days. I cannot give you a better idea of them than by saying that, at times, my master could hardly manage to spend all the money his representations produced."

"It is a pity that your master," I said to Antonio, "did not place less trust in the future, and save a portion of that fortune which he would gladly have today."

"We have often made that reflection," he replied, "but it only increased our regret. And how could we suppose then that Fortune would turn her back on us so suddenly? Besides, my master thought luxury necessary to acquire that prestige which he liked to possess, and considered justly that his prodigality added to the popularity his talent had procured him."

This confidential talk would probably have lasted longer, had not Torrini called Antonio, who suddenly quitted me.

One incident struck me in this conversation : it was when Antonio recalled his master's name. This remark only increased my desire to know Torrini's history. But I had no time to lose, as the last performance was announced for the following day, and I was resolved to return home.

I therefore armed myself with courage to overcome the repugnance which, according to Antonio, his master felt about speaking of the past, and after we had breakfasted together, I broke the ice, in the hope I should lead him to tell me all I so much wanted to know.

"You are going to Angoulême to-morrow," I said to him, "and I regret I cannot accompany you : we must separate, however much it may cost me, after the service you have rendered me, and the care you have devoted to me."

I then begged him to let my family know the expenses my illness had entailed, and I ended by assuring him of my deep gratitude. I expected to hear Torrini oppose my departure: but it was not so.

"However much you may press me," he replied, with the greatest calmness, "I will take nothing from you. How can I ask payment for what has caused me so much happiness ? Never talk about that. You wish to leave me," he added, with that affectionate

smile peculiar to him, "and I say you will not leave me."

I was going to reply.

"I say you will not leave me," he repeated, quickly, "because you have no reason to do so, and because, presently, you will have a thousand to remain some time longer with me. In the first place, you require great care to recover your health and root out the remains of an illness which might otherwise return. Besides, I will add, I was awaiting your convalescence to ask a service from you which you cannot refuse; I want you to repair an automaton I bought from a Dutch mechanician, of the name of Opré, and I am sure you will do it admirably."

To these excellent reasons Torrini, who doubtlessly feared some hesitation on my part, joined the most attractive promises.

"To lighten your labours," he said, "we will have long talks about conjuring. I will explain to you the game of piquet, that delighted you so much, and after, when that subject is exhausted, I will tell you the most important events of my life. You will learn from my story what a man is capable of suffering short of death, and the lessons you may draw from a life now almost ended may serve, perchance, to guide you in a career which has hardly yet commenced. Lastly," he said, offering me his hand, "your presence, I trust, will help to dispel those gloomy thoughts which have robbed me so long of my energy."

I could make no reply to these touching solicitations; hence I yielded to Torrini's wishes. The same day he gave me the automaton I was to repair. It was a small harlequin, supposed to leap out of the box in which it was confined, perform some evolutions, and return to prison at the word of command; but it was in such a bad condition, that I had almost to make a new one. For this purpose I arranged a small workshop in the carriage, and, two days later, I began my first automatic labours, while proceeding along the road to Angoulême.

Never shall I forget the charm of that journey. My health was perfectly restored, and with it my gaiety and the full exercise of my moral faculties. Our enormous vehicle, drawn by two horses, could not proceed very rapidly: hence we only covered nine or ten leagues a day, and even then we had to start very early. Still, in spite of our slow locomotion, never did time appear to me to pass so quickly or more agreeably. Was it not the realisation of all my dreams? What more could I desire? Installed in a small, clean room, before a window through which the smiling panorama of Poitou and the Angoumois was unrolled before me, I found myself amidst my beloved tools, working at the construction of an automaton, in which I saw the first-born of a numerous progeny: it was impossible for me to imagine anything to surpass this.

On starting, I attacked my work with such impetuosity, that Torrini, still anxious for my health,

insisted that I should take some rest after every meal. The same day, on leaving the dinner-table, he handed me a pack of cards, and told me to display my skill.

Though frightened by such a clear-sighted spectator, by a judge whose skill had so astonished me, I collected my courage, and began by one of those effects to which I had given the name of "flourishes." It was a brilliant prelude, merely intended to dazzle the eyes while showing the extreme agility of the fingers. Torrini regarded me with indifference, and I fancied I saw a smile playing round his lips. I was, I confess, rather disappointed, but he hastened to console me.

"I really admire your address," he said, "but I put little faith in those flourishes, as you call them. I find them brilliant, but useless. Besides, I am curious to know if you use them at the beginning or end of your card tricks."

"It appears to me logical enough," I replied, "to place them at the beginning, as they are only intended to dazzle the spectators."

"Well, my boy," he went on, "we differ on that point. I think that they ought not to be placed either at the beginning or end of any card tricks. For this reason: after such a brilliant exhibition, the spectator will only see in your tricks the result of dexterity, while, by affecting a good deal of simplicity, you will prevent your audience trying to account for them. Thus you produce a supernatural effect, and pass for a real sorcerer."

I quite agreed in this reasoning, the more so as at the beginning of my experiments I had always considered nature and simplicity the bases of the art of producing illusions, and I had laid down the maxim (only applicable to conjuring) that "you must first gain the confidence of the person you wish to cheat." Hence, I had not been consistent with my principles, and humbly confessed it.

It is certainly a singular occupation for a man to whom frankness is natural, to be continually engaged in concealing his thoughts, and seeking the best way of making dupes. But may it not also be urged that dissimulation and falsehood become qualities or defects according to the purpose they are employed for?

Does not the merchant, for instance, regard them as precious qualities to heighten the value of his wares?

Does the science of diplomacy consist in stating everything with frankness and simplicity?

Lastly, is not fashion, or the usages of decent society, an admirable mixture of dissimulation and deceptions?

As for the art I cultivated, what would it be without falsehood?

Encouraged by Torrini, I regained my assurance. I continued practising all my tricks, and showed him several new inventions of my own. My master paid me some compliments, to which he added sensible advice.

"I recommend you," he said, "to moderate your

vivacity. Instead of displaying so much petulance in your movements, affect, on the contrary, extreme calmness, and thus you will avoid those clumsy gesticulations by which conjurors generally fancy they distract the attention of their spectators, when they only succeed in wearying them."

My professor then, adding example to precept, took the cards from my hands, and showed me in the same passes I had performed the finesses of dissimulation allied to sleight of hand. I looked on with sincere admiration: probably flattered by the impression he had produced on me, Torrini said:

"As we are now on the subject of card tricks, I will explain to you my game of piquet; but, in the first place, you must see the box I employ in its performance."

And he handed me a small box, which I turned over a score times without detecting its use.

"You will seek in vain," he said to me; "a few words would put you on the right track, but I prefer, although the remembrances it summons up are very painful, to tell you how this box fell into my hands, and for what purpose it was originally invented.

"About twenty years ago I was living at Florence, where I practised as a physician. I was not a conjuror in those days (he added, with a profound sigh), and would to Heaven I had never become so!

Among the young men of my own age, I was par-

ticularly intimate with a German of the name of Zilbermann. Like myself, he was a doctor, and equally like myself without practice. We passed the greatest part of our leisure hours together: in other words, we were almost inseparable. Our tastes were much the same, save on one point, where we differed essentially. Zilbermann was passionately fond of gambling, while I felt no attraction for play. My antipathy for cards must indeed have been excessive to prevent me yielding to the force of contagion, for my friend won large sums, enabling him to live like a great gentleman, while I, though most economical, could not help incurring debts. However this may be, Zilbermann and I lived on terms of fraternal intimacy. His purse was at my service, but I used it discreetly, as I knew not when I should be able to return what I borrowed. His delicacy and generosity towards me led me to believe he was frank and loyal with all the world, but I was deceived.

One day, when I had only left him a few hours before, one of his servants came hastily to summon me, stating that his master had been dangerously wounded, and begged to see me at once. I ran off directly, and found my unhappy friend lying on his couch with a face of deadly pallor. Overcoming my grief, I proceeded to offer him succour. Zilbermann stopped me, motioned me to sit down, dismissed his attendants, and, after being assured we were alone, begged me to listen to him. His voice, weakened by the pain he was suffer-

ing, scarcely reached my ear, and I was forced to stoop down over him.

"My dear Edmond," he said to me, "a man accused me of cheating. I challenged him—we fought with pistols—and his bullet is lodged in my chest."

And when I urged Zilbermann to let me attend to him, he added:

"It is useless, my friend. I feel I am wounded to death. I have hardly time to make a confession, for which I claim all your indulgent friendship. Learn, then," he added, offering me a hand damp with death, "I was not unjustly insulted. I am ashamed to confess that, for a long time, I have lived at the expense of my dupes. Aided by a fatal skill, and still more by an instrument I invented, I daily cheated at play."

"How—you, Zilbermann?" I said, withdrawing my hand sharply.

"Yes, I!" the dying man replied, seeming by a glance to supplicate my mercy.

"Edmond!" he added, collecting all his remaining strength, "in the name of our old friendship do not abandon me! For the honour of my family, let not this proof of my infamy be found here. I implore you to remove this instrument." And he showed me a small box attached to his arm.

I unfastened it, and like yourself, my boy, looked at it, without understanding its use. Revived by a thought of his culpable passion, Zilbermann added, with the most lively admiration,

"And yet see how ingenious it was. This box can be attached to the arm without perceptibly increasing its size. Ready packed cards are put in it beforehand; when you are going to cut, you put your hand quietly over the cards on the table, so as to cover them completely; then you press this spring by resting your arm gently on the table. The prepared cards come out while a pair of pincers seizes the other pack and draws it up into the box. To-day, for the first time, the instrument failed me—the pincers left a card on the table. My adversary——"

Zilbermann could not complete the phrase; he had drawn his last gasp.

Zilbermann's confessions and death had overpowered me, and I hastened from his room. On returning home, I began to reflect on what had happened, and, imagining that my known intimacy with the deceased would forbid my stay at Florence, I determined on proceeding to Naples. I took with me the unlucky box, though not foreseeing the use I should eventually make of it; and for a long time I forgot its existence. However, when I turned my attention to conjuring, I thought about my piquet trick, and the fortunate use I made of the box gained me one of my most remarkable triumphs as professor of sleight of hand."

At this recollection, Torrini's eyes sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and prepared me for an interesting anecdote. He proceeded as follows:

"A conjuror, named Comus, had invented a trick at piquet, which he performed, I must allow, with extraordinary dexterity. The praise he acquired in consequence rendered him very boastful; and thus he never failed to announce on his bills that he alone could perform this incomparable trick, thus challenging all the sleight-of-hand professors known. I had some degree of reputation in those days, and Comus's assertion stung me. Knowing his way of doing the trick, and my own to be far superior, I resolved to pick up the glove he threw to all his rivals.

I therefore went to Geneva, where he happened to be, and offered him a share performance, in which a jury should decide on our relative merits. Comus gladly accepted, and on the day fixed an immense number of spectators assembled. Being my senior, my opponent commenced. But, in order that you, my dear Robert, may also act as jury, I will first explain to you how he performed his trick.

Taking a new pack of cards, he undid the cover, had them shuffled, and then taking them in his hand, he managed to get them, as if by accident, either face to face or back to back. This disarrangement gave him time to manipulate the cards, while appearing to be merely putting them in order; thus, when he had finished, I could easily see that he had made an almost imperceptible crease on certain cards, which must give him a suit of eight cards, a king, and fourteen in aces.

This done, Comus handed the cards to his adversary,

begging him to shuffle them again; and, during this time, he had his eyes bandaged. This was a useless precaution, let me observe *en passant*, for whatever care may be taken to deprive a person of sight in this way, the projection of the nose always leaves a vacuum sufficient to see clearly.

When the other player had finished, Comus again took up the cards as if to shuffle them; but you can easily understand that he only arranged them so that the cards he had marked must fall to him in the deal. The *saute de coupe*, as you are aware, neutralises the effect of cutting; hence Comus was certain of success. In fact, matters ended so on this occasion, and hearty applause greeted my rival's victory.

I have reason to believe that a great number of these bravos emanated from his friends and accomplices, for when I came forward in my turn to perform my trick, a murmur of dissatisfaction greeted my appearance on the stage. The ill-will of the spectators was so manifest that it would have intimidated me, had I not then been quite steeled against all applause or dissatisfaction on the part of the public.

The audience were far from suspecting the surprise I had prepared for them, for instead of asking any one to come from the house as my playman, I requested Comus himself to play with me. At this request I saw the people begin to look at each other; but what were the exclamations when, after asking my rival to bandage my eyes and tie my hands, I not only declined

to touch the cards, but left him at liberty, after stating in what suit he would be repiqued, to deal the cards by twos or threes, and choose the hand he preferred!

I had a pack ready prepared in my box, and I was sure of my instrument—need I say that I gained the game?

Owing to my secret arrangements, my mode of acting was so simple, that it was impossible to find out how I did it, while Comus's preliminary manipulations led to the supposition that his dexterity gained the game. I was declared victor unanimously. Shouts greeted this decision; and even Comus's own friends, deserting my rival, came to offer me a pretty gold pin, surmounted by a cup, the symbol of my profession. This pin, as one of the audience told me, had been ordered by poor Comus, who felt certain of winning it back.

I may (Torrini added) fairly boast of this victory; for, though Zilbermann left me the box, he had not taught me the game of piquet, which I invented myself. Was not this trick, I ask you, far superior to Comus's, which, it is true, deceived the multitude, but the poorest sleight-of-hand performer could easily detect?"

Torrini was extremely proud of his inventive skill; but this, I believe, was his sole defect, and he made up for it by his readiness to praise other persons. His story ended, I complimented him most sincerely, not

only on his invention, but on the victory he had gained over Comus.

Travelling in this way, and stopping at times to perform in towns where we might hope to clear a profit, we passed through Limoges, and found ourselves on the road leading from that town to Clermont. Torrini proposed to give some performances in the chief town of the Puy-de-Dôme, after which he intended returning straight to Italy, whose gentle climate and quaint ovations he regretted.

I had made up my mind to part from him there. We had been travelling together about two months; this was about the time I had fixed for the repair of the automaton, and my work was almost concluded. On the other hand, I had a right to ask my dismissal, with no fear of being considered ungrateful. Torrini's health had become as good as we might ever expect, and I had given up to him all the time I could reasonably spare.

Still I did not like to speak about our separation, for the professor, delighted with my progress and skill, could not conceive I could have any other wish but to travel with him, and eventually become his successor. This position would certainly have suited me in many respects, for, as I have said, my vocation was irrevocably fixed. But, whether new instincts were kindled in me, or that the intimacy I lived in with Torrini had opened my eyes to the unpleasantness of such a mode of life, I aimed at something higher than being his successor.

I had therefore made up my mind to leave him; but painful circumstances deferred the moment of separation.

We had just arrived at Aubusson, a town celebrated for its numerous carpet factories. Torrini and his servant were on the box of the carriage: I was at work. We were going down a hill, and Antonio was pulling at the rope which dragged our wheels, when, suddenly, I heard something break, and the carriage started off at full speed. The slightest obstacles produced a tremendous shock, and every moment I expected the carriage to go over.

Trembling, and hardly able to breathe, I clung to my bench as a plank of safety, and, with my eyes closed, awaited the death that appeared inevitable. For a moment we were on the point of escaping the catastrophe. Our powerful horses, skilfully guided by Antonio, had kept up bravely during this rapid descent, and we had passed the first houses in Aubusson, when, as misfortune willed it, an enormous hay-cart emerged from a side street, and barred our passage. The driver did not see the danger till it was too late to avoid it. The accident was inevitable, the collision frightful.

I was momentarily stunned by the pain, but as soon as I recovered I stepped out of the carriage to look after my comrades. I found Antonio, covered with harmless contusions, supporting Torrini, whose arm was dislocated, and leg broken. Our two horses lay dead in the road;

as for the carriage, only the body remained intact: all the rest was knocked to atoms.

A doctor, hurriedly sent for, reached an adjoining inn to which we had been directed almost as soon as ourselves. And here I could not refrain from admiring Torrini's magnanimity, when he insisted on our being looked to first; and, in spite of our entreaties, we could not alter his determination. Antonio and myself were soon all right again, but this was not the case with Torrini: he was obliged to undergo all the operations and different phases of a broken leg.

Although he treated the accident so coolly, it might produce terrible consequences for him: the repair of the carriage, the physician, our forced stay at an inn, would cost him very dear. Could he continue his performances —replace his horses? This idea caused Antonio and myself cruel anxiety: Torrini alone did not despair of the future.

"No matter," he said, with entire confidence in himself; "once I have recovered, all will go on well. Why ought a courageous and healthy man to fear aught? Help yourself, and Heaven will help you! our good La Fontaine wrote. Well, we will all, then, help ourselves, and no doubt we shall escape from this dilemma."

In order to give my company to this excellent man, and distract his thoughts, I put up my bench by his bedside, and, while working, continued the conversations which had been so unfortunately interrupted.

The day at length arrived when I gave the last touch to the automaton, and made it perform before Torrini, who appeared delighted with it. Had our patient been less unfortunate, I should have now quitted him; but could I leave the man who had saved my life in this way? Besides, another thought had occurred to me. Although Torrini told us nothing of his pecuniary position, Antonio and I fancied he was greatly embarrassed. Was it not my duty to try and relieve him, were it in my power? I imparted to Antonio a scheme he approved, though begging me to defer it a little longer, till we found whether our suppositions were correct.

Still the days were very long by my patient's side, for my mechanical job was finished, and sleight of hand was a subject of conversation long exhausted. One day, when Torrini and I were seeking some topic to talk about, I remembered his promise to tell me his life-history, and reminded him of it.

At this request Torrini sighed. "Ah!" he said, "if I could suppress many sad incidents in my story, I should delight to read you a few pleasant pages from an artist's life. However it may be," he added, "I have contracted a debt with you which I must pay.

"Do not expect me to give you a journal of my life; that would be tedious both to you and myself. I will only quote some interesting episodes, and describe to you some tricks you possibly have not heard of. This will be the most amusing portion of my

story," Torrini added, with a smile, "for whatever may be your present resolutions about following my art, I need not be a Nostradamus to predict that you will devote yourself to it some day, and gain immense success. What you are about to hear, my friend, will show you that it is not every man who can say, with the popular proverb, 'Spring, I will not drink thy water!'"

CHAPTER VI.

Torrini relates his Life—Treachery of Chevalier Pinetti—A Conjuror through Malice—A Race between two Magicians—Death of Pinetti—Exhibits before Pius VII.—The Cardinal's Chronometer—Twelve Hundred Francs spent on a Trick—Antonio and Antonia—The most bitter of Mystifications—Constantinople.

My name is Edmond de Grisy, and that of Torrini belongs to Antonio, my brother-in-law. That worthy young man, whom you wrongfully took for my servant, has been good enough to follow me in my evil fortune, and help me in my performances. You must have seen, though, by the way I treat him, that while leaving to him the toil better suited for his age than mine, I regard him as my equal, and consider him my best friend—at least I should have called him so before knowing you—but now, one of my best friends.

My father, the Count de Grisy, resided on his property in Languedoc, the sole resource left him of a once large fortune, which circumstances had sadly diminished. Devoted to Louis XVI., and one of his most faithful servants, on the day of danger he offered

his body as a rampart for his sovereign, and was killed at the storming of the Tuileries on the 18th August.

I was at that time in Paris, and, profiting by the disorders in the capital, I was enabled to pass the barriers, and reach our small family domain. There I dug up a hundred louis my father had concealed for any unforeseen accident; to this money I added some jewels left by my mother, and with these modest resources proceeded to Florence.

The value of my entire property was 5000 francs. On the interest of this sum I could not live; hence I was obliged to seek some profession to support me. I soon formed my decision: taking advantage of the excellent education I had received, I devoted myself to the study of medicine. Four years later I took my degree as doctor; I was then twenty-seven.

I established myself at Florence, where I hoped to form a connexion. Unfortunately for me, in this town, with its gentle climate and reinvigorating sun, the number of physicians was greater than that of the patients, and my new profession was a perfect sinecure.

I have already told you how Zilbermann's death compelled me to quit the capital of Tuscany, and I established myself at Naples. More fortunate than at Florence, immediately on my arrival I was called in to a patient whose illness had defied the skill of the first Italian physicians. He was a young man, of very high family; his recovery gained me great renown,

and I soon took my place among the best Neapolitan physicians. This success, and the fashion I gained by it, opened to me the doors of all the salons, and my name, aided by the manners of a gentleman brought up at the court of Louis XVI., rendered me indispensable at all soirées and festivals.

What a happy and calm existence I might still be enjoying had not destiny, jealous of my happiness, destroyed my future prospects of felicity by hurling me into the vivid and ardent emotions of an artistic life!

The carnival of 1796 had just commenced. At that time one man was the popular idol of the Italians; nothing was spoken of but the marvels achieved by Chevalier Pinetti. This celebrated conjuror came to Naples, and the whole city attended his interesting performances. As I was madly attached to this sort of spectacle, I spent every evening at the theatre, trying to guess the chevalier's tricks, and, unfortunately for myself, I discovered the key to many of them.

But I did not stop here; I also wished to perform them before a few friends: success stimulated me, and made me desirous of increasing my repertoire. At length I could perform all Pinetti's tricks. The chevalier was eclipsed; nothing was spoken of but my skill and address; and every one besought a performance from me. But I did not accede to all these requests, for I was chary in displaying my talent, hoping thus to increase its value.

My privileged spectators were only the more en-

thusiastic, and asserted that I equalled Pinetti, if I did not surpass him.

The public is so happy, my dear lad (Torrini said, with a look of melancholy regret), when it can oppose some rising talent to any artist in renown. It seems as if this sovereign dispenser of fashion and favour takes a malicious pleasure in reminding the man it adores that every reputation is fragile, and that the idol of to-day may be shattered to-morrow.

My vanity forbade my thinking of this. I believed in the sincerity of the praise bestowed on me; and I, the earnest student, the clever doctor, was proud of my futile success.

Pinetti, far from seeming jealous of my triumph, evinced a desire to form my acquaintance, and even came to call upon me. He might have been about forty-six years of age at this time, but his elegant toilet made him appear much younger. There was something distinguished in his face, though the features were common-place and irregular, and his manners were excellent. Still, by an inexplicable want of judgment, he used, when performing, to wear a brilliant general's uniform, on which numerous decorations glistened.

This peculiarity, which bordered too much on the charlatan, ought to have enlightened me as to the man's moral value; but my passion for conjuring rendered me blind. We met like old friends, and our intimacy was almost instantaneous. Pinetti was most affable, talked about his secrets unreservedly, and even

offered to take me to the theatre and show me his stage arrangements. I accepted the offer with the greatest readiness, and we entered his richly ornamented carriage.

From that moment the chevalier treated me with the utmost familiarity. In any other this would have wounded my pride, or at least aroused my suspicion, and I should have been on my guard. On the contrary, I was enchanted with Pinetti, for, by his unbounded luxury, he had gained such consideration, that the noblest young gentlemen in the city were proud of his friendship. Why, then, should I be more haughty than they? In a few days we had become almost inseparable friends, only parting at the time of our mutual performances.

One evening, after one of my private exhibitions, I proceeded to sup as usual with Pinetti, my head still a-glow with the compliments I had received. I found him alone. On seeing me enter, the chevalier ran up to me, embraced me affectionately, and asked how my performance had gone off. I did not hide my success from him.

"Ah! my friend," he said, "that does not surprise me; you are incomparable: indeed, I should not be paying you a forced compliment if I said you might challenge the most skilful among us."

And during the whole supper, despite my efforts to stop him, he would only speak of my skill and address. Though I tried to decline his compliments, the che-

valier seemed so sincere, that I ended by accepting them. In fact, I was so convinced of their truth, that I began to pay myself some compliments; for how could I believe it was all a trick to make a fool of me? When Pinetti saw I had arrived at this stage, and that the champagne had turned my head, he said:

"Do you know, my dear count, that you could offer the Neapolitans a surprise to-morrow, worth its weight in gold for the poor?"

"How?" I asked.

"Suppose, my dear friend, you take my place in a performance I am going to give on behalf of the poor. We will put your name in the bills instead of mine, and it will be regarded as a noble and honourable understanding between two artists. One representation the less will not injure my reputation, while it will cover you with glory; I shall thus have the double satisfaction of helping the unfortunate, and displaying my best friend's talent to advantage."

This proposal so startled me, that I rose from table, as if fearing to hear more. But Pinetti was gifted with such persuasive eloquence, and he seemed to promise himself so much pleasure from my future triumph, that at length I ended by yielding all he asked.

"That is right," Pinetti said to me; "dismiss such want of confidence in yourself, which could be hardly pardoned in a schoolboy. Now, matters settled so far, we have no time to lose. Let us draw up the bill:

choose among my tricks those you prefer, and, as for the preparations, trust to me: I will take care all is in order."

The greater number of Pinetti's tricks were performed by the help of accomplices, who brought to the theatre various objects of which the conjuror had doubles. This singularly facilitated the pretended marvels, and I had no doubt of success.

We soon drew up the bill, at the top of which I wrote my name with great emotion; then came a list of the tricks I proposed to do. Just as we finished this, the usual guests entered the room, offering excuses more or less specious to explain their delay. Still their tardy appearance aroused no suspicion in my mind; for Pinetti's was open all hours of the night, and his door was only closed from daybreak till two P.M., the time he devoted to sleep and dress.

As soon as the new arrivers heard of my resolution, they noisily congratulated me, and promised to support me by their hearty applause. Not that I wanted it, they added, for my performance would create an extraordinary enthusiasm. Pinetti gave one of his servants the bill, telling him to order the printer to have it posted all over the city before daybreak.

An impulse made me stretch out my hand to take back the paper, but Pinetti checked me with a laugh.

"Come, my dear friend," he said, "do not try to fly an assured triumph, and to-morrow at this hour we shall all be toasting your success."

All the visitors joined in chorus, and they drank in anticipation of my approaching triumph. A few glasses of champagne dispelled my hesitation and scruples.

I returned home very late, and went to bed without thinking of what had occurred. At two the next afternoon I was still asleep, when I was aroused by Pinetti's voice:

"Get up, Edmond!" he shouted through the door. "Up, man! we have no time to lose: the great day has arrived. Open the door: I have a thousand things to say to you."

I hastened to open.

"Ah! my dear count," he said, "allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune. Your name is in every mouth: the whole theatre is taken; the last tickets are being positively fought for; the king and the royal family will do you the honour of being present; we have just been informed of the fact."

At these words the whole affair flashed across my mind: a cold perspiration stood on my forehead: the terror that assails every novice rendered me dizzy. In my confusion I sat down on the foot of my bed.

"Do not reckon on me, chevalier," I said, with firmness. "Whatever may happen, I will not perform."

"What! you will not perform?" my perfidious friend said, affecting the most perfect tranquillity; "but, my good fellow, you cannot be thinking of what you are saying. There is no possibility of drawing back: the bills are put up, and it is your duty to keep

the engagement you have made. Besides, you should remember this performance is for the poor, who have already begun to bless you, and you cannot abandon them, while a refusal would be an insult to the king. Come, come," he added, "summon up your courage, my dear friend. Meet me at the theatre at four: we will have a rehearsal, which I consider useless, but it may restore your pluck. Till then, good-by!"

So soon as I was left to myself, I remained for nearly an hour absorbed in thought, trying in vain to elude the performance. An insurmountable barrier ever prevented escape: the king, the poor, the entire city—all, in short, rendered it an imperious duty to keep my rash promise. At length I began to think there was no serious difficulty about the performance, for a great number of the tricks, as I have already said, being performed by the help of friends, these took the chief labour on themselves. Encouraged by this idea, I gradually regained my courage, and at four o'clock joined Pinetti at the theatre with a degree of assurance that surprised even him.

As the performance did not begin till eight, I had ample time to make my preparations, and I employed it so well, that, when the moment arrived to appear on the stage, my foolish fears were completely dissipated, and I presented myself before the public with sufficient coolness for a novice.

The theatre was crowded. The king and his family, seated in a stage box, appeared to regard me with

sympathising glances; for his majesty was probably aware of my being a French émigré.

I boldly commenced my performance with a trick which must eminently excite the imagination of the spectators. I had to borrow a ring, place it in a pistol, and fire through a window opening from the stage into the sea that bathed the theatre-walls. This done, I would open a box, previously examined, closed, and sealed by the audience, and in it would be found an enormous fish bearing the ring in its mouth.

Full of confidence in the success of the trick, I proceeded towards the pit to borrow a ring. Of twenty offered me I selected one belonging to an accomplice of Pinetti's, and begged him to place it with his own hands in the barrel of the pistol I handed to him. Pinetti had told me that his friend would use for this purpose a copper ring, which would be sacrificed, and that I should return him a gold one in its place.

The spectator obeyed me. I then opened the window and fired the pistol. Like the soldier on the battle-field, the smell of powder excited me; I felt full of fun and gaiety, and ventured on a few jests, which pleased the audience. Taking advantage of the general hilarity, I seized my magic wand and traced my cabalistic circles round the box. At length I broke the seals and triumphantly produced the fish, which I carried to the owner of the ring, that he might take it out of the fish's mouth.

If the accomplice play his part well, he must evince

the greatest stupefaction, and, indeed, the gentleman, on receiving the ring, began looking around him, and his face grew very long. Proud of my success, I went back on the stage and bowed in reply to the applause I received. Ah, my dear Robert! this triumph lasted but a short time, and became to me the prelude of a terrible mystification.

I was proceeding to another trick, when I saw my spectator gesticulating to his neighbours, and then turning to me as if wishing to address me. I fancied he was going on with the farce to dispel any suspicion of collusion; still I thought he went too far. What was my surprise, then, when the man rose and said:

"Excuse me, sir, but it seems as if your trick is not over, since you have given me a copper ring set with paste instead of my diamond solitaire."

As a mistake seemed to me impossible, I turned on my heel and commenced my preparations for the next trick.

"Sir," my obstinate spectator again took the word, "will you have the goodness to reply to my question? If the end of your trick be a jest, I acknowledge it as such, and you can return me my ring presently. If it be not so, I cannot accept the horrible substitute you have handed me."

Every one was silent: none knew the meaning of this protest, though many fancied it was an ordinary mystification, which would end in still greater glory for the performer. The claimant, the public, and myself

found ourselves in the same state of uncertainty; it was an enigma which I alone could solve—and I did not know the word.

Hoping, however, to escape from a position as critical as it was ridiculous, I walked up to my pitiless creditor, and, on looking at the ring I had given him, I was startled at finding it was really coarsely gilt copper. "Could the spectator to whom I applied have been no accomplice?" I thought. "Could Pinetti desire to betray me?" This supposition appeared to me so hateful that I rejected it, preferring to attribute the fatal mistake to chance. But what should I do or say? My head was all on fire.

In my despair, I was about to offer the public some explanation of this untoward accident, when an inspiration temporarily relieved me from my embarrassment.

"Do you still believe, sir," I said to the plaintiff, after assuming an extreme degree of calmness, "that your ring has been changed into copper while passing through my hands?"

"Yes, sir; and, besides, the one you have returned me does not in the slightest degree resemble mine in shape."

"Very good, sir," I continued, boldly; "that is the real marvel of the trick; that ring will insensibly assume its old form on your finger, and by to-morrow morning you will see it is the one you lent me. That is what we term in the language of the cabala the 'imperceptible transformation.'"

This reply gained me time. I intended to see the claimant when the performance was over, pay him the price of the ring, whatever it might be, and beg him to keep my secret. After this happy escape I took up a pack of cards and continued my performance, and as the accomplices had nothing to do in this trick, I felt sure of success. Approaching the royal box, I begged his majesty to do me the honour of drawing a card. He did so very affably; but to my horror, the king had no sooner looked at the card he had drawn, than he threw it angrily on the stage, with marks of most profound dissatisfaction.

The blow dealt me this time was too direct for me to attempt parrying it or turning it aside. But I was anxious to know the meaning of such a humiliating affront, so I picked up the card. Imagine, my dear boy, the full extent of my despair when I read a coarse insult to his majesty, written in a hand I could not mistake. I attempted to stammer some excuse, but by a gesture the king disdainfully commanded silence.

Oh, I cannot describe to you all that then passed in my mind, for a dizziness attacked my brain, and I felt as if I were going mad.

I had, at length, obtained a proof of Pinetti's perfidy. He had determined on covering me with disgrace and ridicule, and I had fallen into the infamous snare he had so treacherously laid for me. This idea restored my wild energy: I was seized by a ferocious desire for revenge, and I rushed to the side scene,

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where my enemy should be stationed. I meant to seize him by the collar, drag him on the stage like a malefactor, and force him to demand pardon.

But the juggler was no longer there. I ran in every direction like a maniac, but wherever I might turn, cries, hisses, and shouts pursued me, and distracted my brain. At length, bowed down by the weight of such intense emotions, I fainted.

For a week I remained in a raging fever, incessantly yelling for revenge on Pinetti. And I did not know all then.

I learned afterwards that this unworthy man, this false friend, had emerged from his hiding-place on my fainting. He had gone on the stage at the request of some of his accomplices, and continued the performance, to the great satisfaction of the entire audience.

Thus, then, all this friendship—all these protestations of devotion—were only a farce—a very juggling trick. Pinetti had never felt the slightest affection for me; his flattery was only meant to draw me into the trap he had laid for my vanity, and he wished to destroy by a public humiliation a rival who annoyed him.

He was perfectly successful in this respect, for from that day my most intimate friends, fearing, probably, that the ridicule I endured might be reflected on them, suddenly turned their backs on me. This desertion affected me deeply, but I had too much pride to beg the renewal of such passing friendship, and I resolved

on quitting Naples immediately. Besides, I was planning a scheme of vengeance, for which solitude was necessary.

Pinetti, like the coward he was, had fled after the atrocious insult he had offered me. To have challenged him would be doing him too much honour, so I vowed to fight him with his own weapons, and humiliate the shameful traitor in my turn.

This was the plan I drew up:

I determined to devote myself ardently to sleight of hand, and study thoroughly an art of which I as yet knew only the first principles. Then, when quite confident in myself—when I had added many new tricks to Pinetti's repertoire—I would pursue my enemy, enter every town before him, and continually crush him by my superiority.

Full of this idea, I sold everything I possessed, and took refuge in the country, where, completely retired from the world, I prepared my plans for vengeance. I cannot describe to you, my friend, what patience I devoted and how I toiled during the six months my voluntary retreat lasted; but I was more than compensated for it, as my success was complete. I gained a degree of skill to which I had never dared to pretend: Pinetti was no longer my master, and I became his rival.

Not satisfied with these results, I intended also to eclipse him by the richness of my stage. I, therefore, ordered apparatus of unknown brilliancy in those days,

spending in this every farthing I possessed. With what delight did I regard these glittering instruments, each of which seemed to me a weapon capable of inflicting mortal wounds on my adversary's vanity. How proudly my heart beat at the thought of the contest I would commence with him!

Henceforth, it would be a duel of skill between Pinetti and myself, but a mortal duel; one of us must remain on the ground, and I had reason to hope that I should be the victor in the struggle.

Before commencing my tour I made some inquiries about my rival, and learned that, after traversing Southern Italy, he had just left Lucca, *en route* for Bologna. I learned, too, that, on leaving that city, he intended to visit Modena, Parma, and Piacenza.

Without loss of time I set out for Modena, in order to precede him there, and thus prevent him performing. Enormous bills announced the representations of "THE COUNT DE GRISY, THE FRENCH ARTIST," and my programme was most attractive, for it contained all Pinetti's tricks. The papers had puffed the latter so extravagantly for some time past, that I felt sure my performance would be gladly witnessed.

In fact, my room was taken by storm, as eagerly as on my disastrous performance at Naples; but this time the result was very different. The improvements I had introduced in my rival's tricks, and the great skill I displayed in performing them, gained me a unanimous verdict.

From this time my success was ensured, and the following performances raised my name above that of all the most fashionable magicians of the day. According to the plan I had laid down, I left Modena when I heard of Pinetti's approach, and went to Parma. My rival, full of faith in his merits, and not believing in my success, took the theatre I had just left. But he began to be bitterly undeceived; the whole city was satiated with the style of amusement he announced; no one responded to his appeal, and, for the first time, the success to which he was accustomed slipped from his grasp.

Chevalier Pinetti, who had so long held undivided sway, was not the man to yield to a person he called a novice. He had guessed my plans, and, far from awaiting the attack, he acted on the offensive, and came to Parma, where he opened a room exactly opposite mine. But this town was lost to him like the last: he had the misery of seeing my theatre continually filled, while his was quite deserted.

I must tell you, too, my friend, that all the money I netted only covered my luxurious outlay. What did I care for gold and silver? I only dreamed of revenge, and to satisfy that feeling I squandered my money. I wished, above all, to pale that star which had formerly eclipsed me. I displayed regal pomp in my performances; the theatre and its approaches were literally covered with tapestry and flowers, while the house and the stage, glistening with light, presented

to the dazzled eyes of the audience numerous escutcheons, bearing compliments to the ladies, who were thus quite gained over to the side of the gallant Count de Grisy.

In this way I crushed Pinetti, although he did all in his power to offer me a vigorous resistance. But what could his tinsel and old-fashioned ornaments avail against what I may fairly term my elegance and distinguished manners ?

Piacenza, Cremona, Mantua, Vicenza, Padua, and Venice, were witnesses of our desperate struggle, and, despite his rage and despair, the arrogant Pinetti was obliged to endure my superiority, if he did not recognise it. Abandoned by even his most zealous admirers, he determined to quit the field, and proceeded towards Russia. Some slight success partly consoled his late defeats, but, as if Fortune were determined on making him repay the favours she had so long lavished on him, a tedious and painful illness exhausted his strength as well as his slight savings. Reduced to a state of abject misery, he died at the village of Bartitchoff, in Volhynia, at the house of a nobleman, who sheltered him from compassion.

Pinetti once gone, my revenge was satiated, and, being master of the battle-field, I might have abandoned a profession ill fitted for my birth. But my medical connexion was broken up, and, on the other hand, I yielded to a motive which you will appreciate some day; when a man has once tasted the intoxica-

tion produced by the applause of the public, it is very difficult to renounce it; with my will or against it, I must continue my profession as conjuror.

I therefore determined on profiting by the reputation I had gained, and proceeded to Rome, as a brilliant termination to my Italian representations. Pinetti had never dared to enter that city, less through distrust of himself than through fear of the Inquisition, of which he could only speak with terror. The chevalier was extremely prudent whenever he was personally concerned: he feared being treated like a sorcerer, and ending his days in an auto da fè. More than once he had bid me take warning by the unhappy Cagliostro, who was condemned to death, and only owed to the clemency of the Pope the commutation of the penalty into perpetual imprisonment.

Confiding in the intelligence of Pius VII., and, besides, having no pretensions to the necromancy Pinetti affected, nor to the charlatanism of Cagliostro, I proceeded to the capital of the Christian world, where my performances created a great sensation. His Holiness himself, on hearing of me, did me the signal honour of requesting a performance, at which I was advised all the dignitaries of the Church would form my audience.

You can fancy, my lad, with what eagerness I acquiesced in his wish, and what care I devoted to my preparations. After selecting all my best tricks, I ransacked my brain to invent one worthy of my

illustrious spectators. But I had no need to search long, for chance, that most ingenious of inventors, came to my aid.

On the day prior to the performance I was in the shop of one of the first watchmakers of Rome, when a servant came in to ask if his eminence the Cardinal de ——'s watch were repaired.

"It will not be ready till this evening," the watchmaker replied; "and I will do myself the honour of carrying it to your master myself."

When the servant had retired, the tradesman said to me:

"This is a handsome and capital watch. The cardinal to whom it belongs values it at more than 10,000 fr.; for, as he ordered it himself of the celebrated Breguet, he fancies it must be unique of its kind. Strangely enough, though, only two days ago, a young scamp belonging to this city offered me a precisely similar watch, made by the same artist, for 1000 fr."

While the watchmaker was talking to me, I had already formed a plan.

"Do you think," I said to him, "that this person is still inclined to dispose of his watch?"

"Certainly," the watchmaker replied. "This young prodigal, who has spent all his fortune, is now reduced to sell his family jewels: hence the 1000 fr. will be welcome."

"Is he to be found?"

"Nothing easier: in a gambling-house he never quits."

"Well, then, sir, I am anxious to purchase the watch, but it must be to-day. Have the kindness, then, to buy it for me. After that, you will engrave on it his eminence's arms, so that the two watches may be perfectly similar, and on your discretion the profit you make by the transaction will depend."

The watchmaker knew me, and probably suspected the use I intended to make of the watch; but he was assured of my discretion, as the honour of my success would depend on it. Hence he said:

"I only require a quarter of an hour to go to the gambling-house, and I am confident your offer will be accepted."

The quarter of an hour had not elapsed ere my negotiator returned with the chronometer in his hand.

"Here it is!" he said, with an air of triumph. "My man received me like an envoy from Providence, and gave me the watch without even counting the money. To-night all will be ready."

In fact, that same evening the watchmaker brought me the two chronometers, and handed me one. On comparing them, it was impossible to detect the slightest difference. It cost me dear, but I was now certain of performing a trick which must produce a decided effect.

The next day I proceeded to the Pontiff's palace, and at six o'clock, upon a signal given by the Holy Father, I stepped on the stage. I had never appeared before such an imposing assembly. Pius VII., seated in a large arm-chair on a daïs, occupied the foreground:

near him were seated the cardinals, and behind them were the different prelates and dignitaries of the Church.

The Pope's face breathed benevolence, and it was fortunate for me, for the sight of this smiling and gentle face dissipated an unpleasant idea which had been strangely troubling me for some moments.

"Suppose this performance," I said to myself, "were merely a feigned examination to make me confess my connexion with the infernal powers? May not my words be taken down, and perhaps Cagliostro's perpetual imprisonment be reserved as the punishment for my innocent experiments?"

My reason soon dismissed such an absurdity—it was not probable the Pope would lend himself to such an unworthy snare. Although my fears were completely removed by this simple reasoning, my opening address displayed my feelings in some degree, for it seemed more like a justification than the prelude to a performance.

"Holy Father!" I said, bowing respectfully, "I am about to show you some experiments to which the name of 'White Magic' has been most unjustly given. This title was invented by charlatans to impress the multitude, but it only signifies a collection of clever deceptions intended to amuse the imagination by ingenious artifices."

Satisfied by the favourable impression my address produced, I gaily commenced my performance. I

could not describe to you, my dear lad, all the pleasure I felt on this evening; and the spectators seemed to take such lively interest in all they saw, that I felt myself in unusual spirits. The Pope himself was delighted.

"But, Monsieur le Comte," he continually said, with charming simplicity, "how can you do that? I shall be quite ill with merely trying to guess your secrets."

After the "blind man's game of piquet," which literally astounded the audience, I performed the trick of the "burnt writing," to which I owe an autograph I set a great store by. This is how the trick is done:

A person writes a sentence or two: he is then requested to burn the paper, which must be afterwards found intact in a sealed envelope. I begged his Holiness to write a sentence: he consented, and wrote as follows:

"I have much pleasure in stating that M. le Comte de Grisy is an amiable sorcerer."

The paper was burned, and nothing could depict the Pope's astonishment on finding it in the centre of a large number of sealed envelopes. I received his permission to keep this autograph.

To end my performance, and set the crown on my exploits, I now proceeded to the trick I had invented for the occasion.

Here I had several difficulties to contend with; the greatest was certainly to induce Cardinal de —— to lend me his watch, and that without asking him directly for it, and, to succeed, I must have recourse to

a ruse. At my request several watches were offered me, but I returned them with the excuse, more or less true, that, as they had no peculiarity of shape, it would be difficult to prove the identity of the one I chose.

"If any gentleman among you," I added, "has a watch of rather large size (this was the peculiarity of the cardinal's), and would kindly lend it to me, I should prefer it as better suited for the experiment. I need not say I will take the greatest care of it; I only wish to prove its superiority, if it really possess it, or, on the other hand, to marvellously improve it."

All eyes were naturally turned on the cardinal, who, it was known, set great value on the exaggerated size of his chronometer. He asserted, with some show of reason perhaps, that the works acted more freely in a large case. However, he hesitated to lend me his beloved watch, till Pius VII. said to him:

"Cardinal, I fancy your watch will suit exactly; oblige me by handing it to M. de Grisy."

His eminence assented, though not without numberless precautions; and when I had the chronometer in my hands, I drew the attention of the Pope and the cardinals to it, while pretending to admire the works and handsome chasing.

"Is your watch a repeater?" I then said to the cardinal.

"No, sir, it is a chronometer, and watches of that degree of accuracy are not usually encumbered with unnecessary machinery."

"Indeed! a chronometer; then it must be English?" I said, with apparent simplicity.

"What, sir?" the cardinal replied, as if stung by my remark, "do you think chronometers are only made in England? On the contrary, the best specimens have always been made in France. What English maker can be compared with Pierre Leroy, Ferdinand Berthoud, or Bréguet above all, who made that chronometer for me?"

The Pope began to smile at the cardinal's energy.

"Well, then, we will select this chronometer," I said, putting a stop to the conversation I had purposely started. "I have, then, gentlemen, to prove to you its solidity and excellent qualities. Now for the first trial."

And I let the watch fall on the ground. A cry of terror rose on all sides, while the cardinal, pale and trembling, bounded from his seat, saying, with ill-suppressed wrath,

"You are playing a very sorry jest, sir."

"But, monseigneur," I said, with the greatest calmness, "you have no occasion to be frightened; I merely wish to prove to these gentlemen the perfection of your watch. I beg you not to be alarmed; it will escape scathless from all the trials I subject it to."

With these words I stamped on the case, which broke, flattened, and soon presented but a shapeless mass. At first, I really fancied the cardinal was going

into a fit; he could scarcely restrain his passion; but the Pope then turned to him:

"Come, cardinal, have you no confidence in our sorcerer? For my part, I laugh like a child at it, being convinced there has been some clever substitution."

"Will your Holiness permit me to remark," I said, respectfully, "that there has been no substitution? I appeal to his eminence, who will recognise his own watch."

And I offered the cardinal the shapeless relics of his watch. He examined them anxiously, and finding his arms engraved inside the case, said, with a deep sigh,

"Yes, that is certainly my watch. But," he added, dryly, "I know not how you will escape, sir: at any rate, you should have played this unjustifiable trick on some object that might be replaced, for *my* chronometer is unique!"

"Well, your excellency, I am enchanted at that circumstance, for it must enhance the credit of my experiment. Now, with your permission, I will proceed."

"Good gracious me, sir, you did not consult me before destroying the watch. Do what you please, it is no concern of mine."

The identity of the cardinal's watch thus proved, I wished to pass into the Pope's pocket the one I had bought the previous evening. But I could not dream of this so long as his Holiness remained seated. Hence,

I sought some pretext to make him rise, and soon found one.

A brass mortar, with an enormous pestle, was now brought in. I placed it on the table, threw in the fragments of the chronometer, and began pounding furiously. Suddenly, a slight detonation was heard, and a vivid light came from the vessel, which cast a ruddy hue over the spectators, and produced a magical appearance. All this while, bending over the mortar, I pretended to see something that filled me with the liveliest astonishment.

Through respect for the Pope, no one ventured to rise, but the Pontiff, yielding to his curiosity, approached the table, followed by a portion of the audience. They might look and look: nothing was to be seen but flame.

"I know not whether I must attribute it to the dazed state of my brain," said his Holiness, passing his hand over his eyes, "but I can distinguish nothing."

I, too, had much the same idea, but, far from confessing it, I begged the Pope to come round the table and choose a more favourable spot. During this time I slipped my reserve watch into the Pope's pocket. The experiment was certain, and the cardinal's watch had, by this time, been reduced to a small ingot, which I held up to the spectators.

"Now," I said, "I will restore this ingot to its original shape, and the transformation shall be per-

formed during its passage to the pocket of a person who cannot be suspected of complicity."

"Aha!" the Pope said, in a jocular tone, "that is becoming a little too strong. But what would you do, my good sorcerer, if I asked you to choose my pocket?"

"Your Holiness need only order for me to obey."

"Well, Monsieur le Comte, let it be so."

"Your Holiness shall be immediately satisfied."

I then took the ingot in my fingers, showed it to the company, and it disappeared on my uttering the word "Pass!"

The Pope, with manifestations of utter incredulity, thrust his hand into his pocket. I soon saw him blush with confusion, and draw out the watch, which he handed to the cardinal as if afraid of burning his fingers.

At first it was supposed to be a mystification, as no one could believe in such an immediate repair; but when my audience were assured that I had fulfilled my promise, I received the applause so successful a trick deserved.

The next day the Pope sent me a rich diamond snuff-box, while thanking me for all the pleasure I had occasioned him.

This performance created a great sensation at Rome, and every one flocked to see my marvels. Perhaps they hoped to witness the famous trick of the "Broken Watch," which I had performed at the Vatican. But

though I was then very extravagant, I was not so mad as to spend 1200 francs a night in the performance of a trick which could never again be done under such favourable auspices.

An operatic company was attached to the theatre while I performed, but their performances were suspended during my stay in Rome. The manager employed this leisure time to rehearse a fresh piece to be performed on my departure, and this gave me a daily opportunity to mix with the actors. I had formed a peculiar friendship with one of the youngest of them, a charming lad of eighteen, with a tenor voice, whose elegant and regular features formed a singular contrast to his emplóyment. His feminine face, with his small waist and timid demeanour, quite injured the effect when he played the part of a lover; he looked like a boarding-school miss in man's clothes. Yet, I discovered afterwards that this effeminate person contained a bold and manly heart, for Antonio (such was the tenor's name) had been engaged in several affairs of honour, in which he had done his manly devoir.

At this part of Torrini's story I interrupted him, for the name of Antonio struck me.

"What!" I said, "can it be that——?"

"Certainly; the same person! Your astonishment is justifiable, but it will cease when I tell you that more than twenty years have elapsed since the time I speak of. At that period, Antonio did not wear a

heavy black beard, and his face had not yet been embrowned by the open air and the fatigues of our laborious and nomadic life."

Antonio's mother was also engaged at the theatre; she performed in the ballets, and her name was Lauretta Torrini. Though close upon forty, she had retained all her pristine charms. She must have been very beautiful in her time, but the greatest scandal-mongers could not reproach her with the least levity. She was the widow of a government clerk, and had brought up her family by her own labour.

Antonio was not her only child; she had borne a daughter with him. These twins, as frequently happens, had such a striking resemblance, that only their dress distinguished them; and they had been christened Antonio and Antonia. The lad received a musical education at the theatre, but Antonia was always sedulously kept from the stage. After a careful education, her mother had placed her in a milliner's shop, till she could set up for herself.

I have dwelled so long on this family because, as you can guess, it soon became my own. My friendship for Antonio was not quite disinterested, for I owed to it an introduction to his sister. Antonia was lovely and virtuous: I asked her hand, and was accepted. Our marriage was to take place as soon as my engagement had terminated, and it was arranged that Lauretta and Antonio should share our fortunes.

I have already said that Antonio appeared effeminate; but although large black eyes, fringed with long eyelashes, and exquisitely pencilled eyebrows, a Grecian nose, and fresh and ruddy lips, were almost wasted on Antonio, still these advantages admirably suited my betrothed. Such a treasure could not long remain concealed: Antonia was noticed, and all the rich young nobles fluttered round her. But she loved me, and had no difficulty in resisting the numerous and brilliant offers made her.

While waiting the wished-for day, Antonia and I formed plans for our future happiness. She would enjoy a travelling life, and as she longed for a sea-voyage, I promised to take her to Constantinople. I wished to perform before Selim III., who was considered an enlightened prince, and hospitably treated the artists he assembled at his court. All, then, seemed to smile on my plans, when one morning, while dreaming of these pleasant prospects, Antonio suddenly entered my room.

"My dear Edmond," he said, "I defy you to guess where I have been, and what has happened to me since last evening. I must tell you, then, as prelude to my story, that, dragged, in spite of myself, into a drama, which threatened to become very sanguinary, I turned it into a farce, the details of which are worth hearing. You shall judge.

"I was at the theatre yesterday, when a carpenter, a

worthy man in many respects, but who spends three parts of his time in public-houses, came up and begged to tell me a secret.

"Monsieur Antonio," he said, "if you wish to prevent a great evil, you have no time to lose. I have just been drinking with some of my comrades, and a man, whose acquaintance we had formed over the bottle, told us we could gain a large sum easily. The proposal was so agreeable that we accepted it unanimously, on condition of knowing what was wanted of us. We were told, and this is what we promised to do:

"This evening, when your sister leaves her shop, we are to surround her, as if quarrelling, and drown her cries by our shouts. The Marquis d'A——'s people will manage the rest. Now do you understand?"

I only understood too well, and, scarcely thanking the carpenter, I rushed off at full speed. Fortunately my brains did not fail me. I was in front of a gunsmith's: I went in, bought a pair of pistols, and then hastened home.

"Mother," I said, as I went in, "I have made a bet that I should be taken for Antonia by putting on her clothes. Dress me, then, quickly, and tell my sister I beg her to leave the shop half an hour later than usual."

My mother did as I asked, and when I was dressed I so perfectly resembled Antonia that she kissed me, and burst into a hearty laugh at my pleasant idea.

Nine o'clock had just struck: it was the hour ap-

pointed for the abduction. I hastened away, doing my best to imitate my sister's walk and manner. My heart beat violently when I saw this band of robbers and servants approach me, and I instinctively put my hands on my fire-arms; but I soon reassumed the timid demeanour of a young girl, and walked onwards.

The affair was executed just as I had been told; I was carried off with all proper respect, in spite of my feigned resistance, and placed in a carriage with the blinds down. The horses started off at a gallop.

There was a man by my side whom I recognised in the gloom: it was certainly the Marquis d'A——. I had to endure his warm excuses, and then his passionate assurances, which sent the blood to my cheeks, and I was several times on the point of betraying myself, but my vengeance was so exquisite and near that I suppressed my anger. My purpose was, so soon as I found myself alone with him, to challenge him to mortal combat.

Half an hour had scarce elapsed when we reached the end of our journey. The marquis begged me to descend, and politely offered me his hand to lead me into a small isolated villa. We entered a brilliantly lighted room, where some young gentlemen and ladies were awaiting us. My abductor, radiant with victory, introduced me to his friends and their companions, and received their felicitations.

I lowered my eyes for fear my passion might be noticed, for I knew that this humiliating triumph had

been reserved for my sister, who would certainly have died of shame. Five minutes later a servant opened the folding-doors, and announced that supper was served.

"To table, friends," the marquis exclaimed—"to table, and let each take the place he likes best!" And he offered me his arm.

We seated ourselves round a sumptuous repast, the marquis waiting on me, for he had dismissed all the attendants. For some time I refused to touch anything; but you know, my dear Edmond, nature has claims which cannot be neglected. I was fearfully hungry, and my appetite was sharpened by the scent of the dainty dishes. In spite of my anger, I was forced to give up my plans of abstention, and yielded to temptation.

I could not eat without drinking, and there was no water on the table. The other ladies had no objection to wine, so I followed their example. Still I was very moderate, and, to play my part properly, I affected great reserve and extreme timidity.

The marquis was delighted to see me behaving thus. He addressed some compliments to me, but noticing they were disagreeable, he did not press me, feeling assured that he could take his revenge at a more suitable season.

We had reached the dessert; the whole of the company were in a charming humour. May I confess to you, my dear Edmond, that the sight of these merry

comrades and coquettish dames produced the same effect on my senses as the dishes had done on my appetite, and insensibly dispelled my gloomy ideas? I had no strength left to continue the dramatic character I had undertaken, and I sought a more satisfactory conclusion. I soon made up my mind.

Three toasts had been drunk in succession: "Wine!" "Play!" "Love!" The ladies had joined in emptying their glasses, while I remained calm and silent. The marquis begged me in vain to join in the general gaiety. Suddenly I rose, glass in hand, and assuming the free-and-easy manner of a soldier—

"Per Bacco!" I shouted, in a barytone voice, giving the marquis a hearty slap on the shoulder. "Drink, my friends, to the lovely eyes of these ladies!" Then I drained my glass at a draught, and trolled out a lively ditty.

I cannot describe the marquis's feelings; all I know is, he turned to stone under my hand. His friends regarded me in stupor, taking me, doubtlessly, for a maniac, while the women laughed convulsively at my strange outbreak.

"Well, gentlemen," I continued, "why are you surprised? Do you not recognise Antonio Torrini, the tenor, all alive and well, and prepared to accept anybody's challenge with the pistol or the glass, he doesn't care which." At the same time I laid my pistols on the table.

At these words, the marquis at length awoke from

the torpor into which the evanishment of his sweet dreams had plunged him, and he raised his hand to strike me in the face. But his eyes no sooner met mine, than, yielding to the influence of an illusion which he abandoned with such pain, he fell back on his chair.

"No!" he said, "I cannot strike a woman."

"Oh, as for that, M. le Marquis," I said, as I left the table, "I only ask ten minutes to appear before you in my proper attire." I then went into an adjoining room, where I doffed gown, petticoats, and finery: I had kept on all my own clothes under my feminine masquerade with the exception of my coat. That article of clothing not being indispensable to receive a blow, and as I was in fighting costume, I returned to the dining-room.

During my absence the scene had changed. I seemed to have "missed my cue," as they say in the theatre, when an actor does not arrive in time to reply. All the guests regarded me with smiles, and one coming up, said:

"Monsieur Antonio, my friend's seconds and yours, appointed *ex officio* during your absence, are agreed that you have taken ample satisfaction, and have no occasion to fight. Do you approve of our decision?"

I offered my hand to the marquis, who took it with very ill grace, for he evidently could not stomach the bitter trick I had played him. This dénoûment satisfied my vengeance, and I withdrew. But, before leav-

ing, each of us pledged our honour to discretion, in which the ladies joined."

After thanking Antonio for his devotion to me, and complimenting him on his quickness, I added:

"These gentlemen acted very gallantly in confiding a secret to the ladies; but I, who flatter myself I can read the human heart, say with François I.,

Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol est qui s'y fie.

For this reason the marriage shall take place the day after to-morrow, and in three days we will start for Constantinople."

Antonio loved his sister as much as myself, and he was right (Torrini added), for she was the most perfect woman earth ever saw. She was an angel!

The Count de Grisy was so excited by these reminiscences, that he raised his arms to heaven, where he seemed to seek the woman he had so deeply loved. But he fell back on his pillow again, exhausted by the agony the disarrangement of his bandages produced. He was forced to break off his narrative till the next day.

CHAPTER VII.

Continuation of Torrini's History—The Grand Turk orders a Performance—A marvellous Trick—A Page cut in two—Pitying Protest of the Harem—Agreeable Surprise—Return to France—Torrini's Son killed—Madness—Decay—My first Performance—An annoying Accident—I return Home.

THE next day, Torrini continued his narration, without awaiting any request from me:

On arriving at Constantinople, we enjoyed for some time a delicious rest, whose charm was heightened by all the intoxication of the honeymoon. At the end of the month, however, I thought our mutual happiness ought not to prevent me trying to realise the plan I had formed of performing in the presence of Selim III.; but, before asking this favour, I thought of giving some performances in the town. However great my reputation might be in Italy, it was hardly probable that my name had crossed the Mediterranean: hence I had a new reputation to achieve.

I had a theatre erected, in which my success con-

tinued: crowds came to see me, and the highest personages were my constant visitors. I may be permitted to boast of this success, my lad, for the Turks, naturally indolent and phlegmatic, when utterly astounded by the sight I offered them, reminded me, by their enthusiasm, of my excitable Italian spectators.

The grand vizir himself came to one of my performances. He spoke about it to his sovereign, and excited his curiosity to such a degree, that I received an invitation, or rather a command, to court. I proceeded, in all haste, to the palace, where the apartment was shown me in which the performance would take place. A body of workmen was placed at my orders, and I was allowed all latitude for my theatrical arrangements. Only one stipulation was made: the stage must be exactly in front of a gilded lattice, behind which, I was told, the Sultan's wives would be seated.

Within two days, my theatre was erected and completely decorated. It represented a garden, filled with natural flowers, whose lively colours and fragrant scent delighted both sight and smell. At the rear, and in the midst of dense foliage, a fountain fell back, in thousands of drops, into a crystal basin, sparkling like diamonds in the brilliant light, while, at the same time, the falling water deliciously cooled the air. Lastly, to my right and left, hedges of flowers served as side scenes and laboratory, while the buffet, loaded with my brilliant apparatus, was erected in the centre of this Garden of Armida.

When all was ready, the Sultan and his numerous suite took the places assigned to them, according to their court precedence. The Sultan reclined on a sofa, with the grand vizir by his side, while an interpreter, keeping respectfully in the rear, translated my remarks to him. When the curtain rose, a shower of rose-leaves fell on the stage, and formed an odoriferous and deliciously soft carpet. I then appeared, dressed in a rich Louis XV. costume.

I will spare you the account of my tricks, with the exception of one, which, like the "broken watch," was the inspiration of the moment. I must add, that my spectators had been already considerably startled when I performed it.

Addressing Selim in the grave and solemn tone proper to a magician, I said:

"Noble Sultan, I am about to proceed from simple tricks of skill to the sublime science of magic: but, in order that my incantations may succeed, I must address myself directly to your august highness. Will you be pleased to lend me this ornament which I require?"

And I pointed to a splendid necklace of pearls which adorned his neck. The Sultan handed it to me, and I placed it in the hands of Antonio, who was helping me, in a page's costume.

"It is well known," I continued, "that magicians possess unlimited powers, for they hold in subjection familiar spirits, who blindly obey their masters' orders.

Let these spirits, then, prepare to obey me, for I am about to summon them."

Here I majestically traced a circle round me with my wand, and pronounced, in a low voice, certain magic spells. Then I turned to my page, to take the collar from him, but it had disappeared. In vain I asked Antonio for it: his only reply was a hoarse and sarcastic laugh, as if he were possessed by one of the spirits I had summoned.

"Mighty prince," I then said to the Sultan, "believe me when I say that, far from sharing in this audacious theft, I am forced to confess myself the victim of a plot I did not at all foresee. But your highness may be reassured: we possess means of forcing our subordinates to return to their duty. These means are as powerful as they are terrible, and I will offer you an example."

At my summons two slaves brought in a long and narrow chest, and a trestle for sawing wood. Antonio seemed to be terribly alarmed, but I coldly ordered the slaves to seize him, place him in the chest, the cover of which was immediately nailed down, and lay it across the trestle. Then, taking up a saw, I prepared to cut the chest asunder, when piercing cries were heard from behind the gilt lattice—the Sultan's wives were protesting against my barbarity. I stopped a moment to give them time to recover; but so soon as I set to work again, new protestations, in which I

distinguished threats, compelled me to suspend my operations.

Not knowing if I might be allowed to address the gilt lattice, I determined to reassure these sympathising ladies indirectly.

"Gentlemen," I said to my numerous audience, "have no fears, I beg, for the culprit; instead of feeling any pain, I assure you he will experience the most delightful sensations."

It was evident that my statement was believed, for silence was restored, and I could continue my experiment. The chest was at length divided into two parts; I raised them so that each represented a pedestal; I then placed them side by side, and covered them with an enormous wicker cone, over which I threw a large black cloth, on which cabalistic signs were embroidered in silver. This duly performed, I recommenced my little farce of magic circles and bombastic words; when suddenly the deep silence was interrupted by two voices performing an exquisite duet beneath the black cloth.

During this time Bengal lights were kindled all around as if by enchantment. At length the fires and the voices having gradually died away, a noise was heard, the cone and the cloth were upset, and——All the spectators uttered a cry of surprise and admiration: for two pages, exactly alike, appeared on the pedestals, holding a silver salver, on which lay the collar of

pearls. My two Antonios walked up to the Sultan, and respectfully offered him his rich ornament.

The whole audience had risen as if to give more effect to the applause bestowed on me; the Sultan himself thanked me in his own language, which I did not understand, but I fancied I read in his face an expression of deep satisfaction. The next day an officer of the palace came to compliment me on behalf of his master, and offered me the collar which had been so cleverly juggled away the previous evening.*

The trick of the *two pages*, as I called it, was one of the best I ever performed, and yet it was probably one of the most simple. Of course you understand, my dear boy, that Antonio disposed of the collar while I distracted public attention by my incantations. You also understand that, while he was being nailed up in the chest, he escaped through an opening corresponding with a trap in the stage; hence I had only to cut through planks. Lastly, by the aid of the cone and the cloth, Antonio and his sister, dressed precisely alike, came up through the trap and took their places on the pedestals. The *mise en scène*, and the coolness of the performers, did the rest.

This trick created great excitement in the city; the story, passing from mouth to mouth, soon attained the

* Selim's was evidently a model court. If the present Sultan were to offer a conjuror a pearl necklace, the chances are it would reach him in the shape of Venice beads.

proportions of a miracle, and contributed much to the success of my remaining performances.

I might have realised a large fortune by making a tour through the Turkish provinces, but I was mortally tired of the peaceful life I was leading, and I felt the need of changing my ground and seeking fresh excitement. Besides, I began to feel a degree of nostalgia, and as my wife begged me to return to Italy, or some other Christian country, as she did not wish our first-born to come into the world among Pagans, we set out for France.

It was my intention to proceed to Paris, but, on arriving at Marseilles, I read in the papers the advertisements of a conjuror of the name of Olivier. His programme contained the whole of Pinetti's tricks, which was almost my own. Which of the two was the plagiarist? I have reason to believe it was Olivier. At any rate, having no desire to engage in a new passage of arms, I evacuated the town.

It is impossible for me, my friend, to describe to you my itinerary during sixteen years; suffice it to say, I traversed the whole of Europe, stopping, of preference, in the chief towns. For a long time my reputation remained at its zenith, but suddenly, like Pinetti, I was destined to experience the inconstancy of Fortune.

One fine day I found my star beginning to pale; the public did not flock so eagerly to my performances, I no longer heard the bravos that used to greet my

appearance on the stage, and the spectators appeared to me indifferent. How was this? What could be the cause of this capricious change? My repertoire was still the same: it was my Italian one, of which I was so proud, and for which I had made such sacrifices; I had introduced no change; the tricks I submitted to the public were the same which had been so warmly accepted. I felt, too, that I had lost none of my vigour, skill, or spirit.

Precisely because I had made no change, the public had begun to grow indifferent; as an author has observed, very justly, "the artist who does not rise, descends;" and this was peculiarly applicable to my position: while civilisation had been progressing, I remained stationary—hence, I was going down.

When this truth struck me, I made a complete reform in my programme. The card tricks no longer possessing the charm of novelty, as the meanest jugglers could do them, were nearly all suppressed, and I substituted other experiments.

The public like, and run after, touching scenes: I invented one, which, in this respect, would certainly satisfy them, and draw them back to me. But why did Heaven allow me to succeed? why did my brain conceive this fatal idea? (Torrini exclaimed, raising his hands to heaven, and his eyes filling with tears). Had it not been so, I should still have my son, and should not have lost my Antonia!

It was some time before Torrini could continue his narrative, for these terrible reminiscences caused him mental torture. At length, after holding his hand over his eyes for some time, as if trying to concentrate himself in his grief, he continued:

About two years ago I was at Strasburg; I was performing at the theatre, and every one was anxious to see my touching scene, which I had named "The Son of William Tell." My son Giovanni played the part of Walter, the son of the Swiss hero, but, instead of placing the apple on his head, he held it between his teeth. On a given signal, a spectator, armed with a pistol, fired at Giovanni, and the ball lodged in the heart of the fruit.

Owing to the success of this trick, my money-box was soon filled again. This restored my confidence in the future, and, far from profiting by the lessons of adversity, I reassumed my luxurious habits, as I fancied I had again pinioned Fortune, and she could not slip from me.

This illusion was fearfully dispelled.

"The Son of William Tell," of which I had made a separate act, usually terminated the performance. We were about to execute it for the thirtieth time, and I had ordered the curtain to be dropped in order to have the stage arranged as the public square of Altorf, but all at once my son, who had just put on the traditional Helvetic costume, came to me, complaining

of a sudden indisposition, and begging me to hurry on the performance. I had just seized the bell-rope to warn the carpenters to raise the curtain, when my son fell down in a fainting fit.

Without caring for the impatience of the public, we paid all attention to my poor Giovanni, and I bore him to a window. The fresh air soon restored him—still, there was a mortal pallor on his face, which would prevent his appearance in public. I was myself assailed by a strange presentiment, which urged me to stop the performance, and I resolved to announce it to the public.

The curtain was drawn up, and, with features contracted by anxiety, I walked to the footlights, Giovanni even paler than myself, and scarce able to stand, being at my side. I briefly explained the accident that had happened, rendering it impossible to perform the final experiment, and offered to return the entrance money to any who might feel dissatisfied. But at these words, which might excite great confusion and grave abuses, my courageous son, making a supreme effort, stated that he felt better, and able to perform his share in the trick, which, after all, was passive, and not at all fatiguing.

The public received this intimation with lively applause, and I, the insensate and barbarous father, taking no heed of the warning Heaven had sent me, had the cruelty, the madness, to accept this generous act of devotion. Only one word was needed to pre-

vent ruin, dishonour, and death, yet that word died away on my lips! Listening solely to the noisy applause of the audience, I allowed the performance to commence.

I have already stated the nature of the trick that attracted the whole town; it consisted in substituting one ball for another. A chemist had taught me how to make a metallic composition bearing an extraordinary resemblance to lead. I had made balls of it which, when placed by the side of the real ones, could not be detected. The only precaution necessary was not to press them too hard, as they were of a very friable nature; but for the same reason, when inserted in the pistol, they fell into an impalpable powder, and did not go further than the wad.

Till now I had never dreamed of any danger in the performance of this trick, and, indeed, I had taken all possible precautions. The false bullets were contained in a small box, of which I alone had the key, and I only opened it at the moment of action. That evening I had been peculiarly careful; then how can I explain the frightful error? I can only accuse fatality. So much is certain—a leaden bullet had been mixed with the others in the box, and was inserted in the pistol.

Conceive all the horror of such an action! Imagine a father, with a smile on his lips, giving the signal which will deprive his son of life—it is frightful, is it not?

The pistol was fired, and the spectator, with cruel

adroitness, had aimed so truly that the bullet crashed through my son's forehead. He fell forward with his face to the ground, rolled over once or twice, and——

For a moment I remained motionless, still smiling at the audience, and incapable of believing in such a misfortune. In a second, a thousand thoughts crossed my brain. Could it be an illusion, a surprise I had prepared, and which I had momentarily forgotten? or was it the return of my son's attack?

Paralysed by doubt and horror, my feet clung to the stage; but the blood welling profusely from the wound violently recalled me to the terrible reality. At last I understood all, and, mad with agony, I cast myself on my son's lifeless corpse.

I know not what took place afterwards, or what became of me. When I recovered the use of my senses, I found myself in prison, with two men before me, a physician and a magistrate. The latter, sympathising with me, was kind enough to perform his painful mission with all possible regard for my feelings; but I could scarce understand the questions he addressed to me; I knew not what to reply, and I contented myself with shedding tears.

I was fully committed, and brought up at the next assizes. I assure you I took my place in the dock with indescribable delight, hoping I should only leave it to receive the just punishment of the crime I had committed. I was resigned to die; I even wished it, and I determined to do all in my power to get rid of a

life which was odious to me. Hence, I offered no defence; but the court requested a barrister to undertake my cause, and he defended me with great skill. I was found guilty of "Homicide through imprudence," and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, which I passed in an infirmary. Here I saw Antonio again for the first time, who brought me terrible news: my dear Antonia, unable to endure such complicated misery, had died of a broken heart.

This new blow affected me so much that I was nearly dead. I spent the greater period of my imprisonment in a state of weakness akin to death; but at length my vigorous constitution overcame all these shocks, and I regained my health. I had quite recovered when the doors of my prison were opened.

Grief and remorse accompanied me wherever I went, and cast me into a state of apathy from which nothing could arouse me. For three months I behaved like a madman, running about the country, and only eating just enough to keep me from perishing of hunger. I went forth at daybreak, and did not return till night. I could not possibly have said what I did during these lengthened excursions, but I probably walked about with no other object than to change place.

Such an existence could not last long; poverty, and her mournful handmaids, soon preyed upon me. My wife's illness, my imprisonment, and our expenses during these three months of listlessness, had swallowed up, not only my money, but also all my appa-

ratus. Antonio explained our situation to me, and begged me to recommence my performances.

I could not leave this good brother, this excellent friend, in such a critical position; I therefore acceded to his entreaties, on condition that I should change my name to Torrini, and never perform in any theatre. Antonio offered to arrange everything to my wish. By selling the valuable presents I had received on various occasions, and which he had managed to secrete from the officers, he paid my debts, and had the carriage built in which we suffered this painful accident.

From Strasburg we proceeded to Basle. My first performances were stamped with the deepest sorrow, but I gradually substituted skill and care for my gaiety and good spirits, and the public accepted the change. After visiting the principal towns in Switzerland, we returned to France, and it was thus I found you, my dear boy, on the road between Tours and Blois.

I saw by Torrini's last sentences, and the manner in which he tried to shorten his narrative, that he not only required rest, but also to recover from the painful emotions these melancholy reminiscences had evoked. A few words, too, Torrini had dropped confirmed my notion that he was in a pecuniary dilemma; hence, I left him under the pretence of letting him sleep, and begged Antonio take a walk with me. I wanted to remind him it was time to carry out the plan we had formed, which consisted in giving a few performances

at Aubusson, without dropping a word of it to our dear master. Antonio was of my opinion; but when it came to deciding which of us should perform, he positively asserted he knew no more of the conjuring art than he had been obliged to learn—he could slip a card, a handkerchief, or a coin into a person's pocket, if required, but nothing more. I learned later that Antonio, though not very skilful, knew more than he pretended.

We decided that I should represent the sorcerer; and I must have been animated with a great desire to help Torrini, and pay him in part the debt of gratitude I owed, ere I consented to mount a stage so suddenly. For, although I had shown my friends some of my tricks, the performance had always been gratuitous; now I had to do with spectators who paid for their seats, and this caused me considerable apprehension.

Still, my resolution once formed, I proceeded with Antonio to the mayor's, in order to obtain his permission to perform. This magistrate was an excellent man; aware of the accident that had happened to us, and that he had it in his power to do a good deed, he offered us the gratuitous use of a concert-room. More than this, to give us a chance of forming some acquaintances who might be of use to us, he begged us to come to his house the next Sunday evening. We accepted this offer gratefully, and had reason to congratulate ourselves on it. The mayor's guests, pleased with certain tricks I showed them, faithfully kept

their promise of attending my first performance, and not one was missing.

My heart panted audibly when the curtain rose, and I was obliged to whisper to myself that the spectators, aware of the object of my performance, would be inclined to look over much. Some cheering applause restored my confidence, and I got through my first tricks very decently. This success heightened my assurance, and at length I acquired a degree of coolness I did not think myself capable of.

It is true, I was perfectly *au fait* in my tricks, through having seen Torrini perform them so often. The principal ones were, the Trowel, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Bird Dead and Alive, and the Omelette in the Hat. I concluded with the Blind Man's Game of Piquet, which I had carefully studied; I was fortunate enough to succeed, and was warmly applauded.

An accident that happened during the performance singularly lessened the joy I felt in my triumph. I had borrowed a hat to make an omelette in. Those who have seen this trick are aware that it is chiefly intended to produce a laugh, and that the object borrowed runs no risk. I had got through the first part excellently, consisting in breaking the eggs, beating them, throwing in the salt and pepper, and pouring it all into the hat. After this, I had to feign the frying of the omelette; I placed a candle on the ground, then, holding the hat sufficiently high above it to escape the flame, I began turning it gently round,

while making some of the stereotyped jokes adapted to the trick. The public laughed so heartily and loudly that I could scarce hear myself speak, but I could not suspect the cause of their hilarity. Unfortunately, I detected it only too soon. A strong scent of burning made me turn my eyes on the candle: it had gone out. I then looked at the hat: the crown was quite burned and stained. I had kept on turning the hat round unsuspectingly, until I at length put it on the top of the candle and covered it with grease.

Quite dazed by this sight, I stopped, not knowing how to escape. Fortunately for me, my alarm, though so truthful, was regarded as a well-played farce: it was supposed this was only a heightened effect, and this confidence in my skill was an additional torture, for my supernatural power could not repair a hat. My only chance was to gain time; so I continued the trick, with a tolerably easy air, and produced to the public a splendidly cooked omelette, which I had enough courage left to season with a few jokes.

Still, that quarter of an hour of which Rabelais speaks had arrived. I must restore the hat, and publicly confess myself a clumsy blockhead. I had resigned myself to this, and was going to do so, with all the dignity I could muster, when I heard Antonio call me from the side. His voice restored my courage, for I felt assured he had prepared some way for my escape. I went up to him, and found him standing with a hat in his hand.

"Look here," he said, exchanging it for the one I held, "it's yours; but no matter, keep a good face: rub it as if you were removing the stains, and, on handing it to the owner, ask him, gently, to read what is at the bottom."

I did as he told me; and the owner of the burnt hat, after receiving mine, was going to betray me, when I pointed to the note fastened in the crown. It ran as follows:

"An act of carelessness caused me to commit a fault, which I will repair. To-morrow I will do myself the honour of asking your hatter's address: in the mean while, be kind enough to act as my accomplice."

My request was granted, for my secret was honestly kept, and my professional honour saved. The success of this performance induced me to give several others: the receipts were excellent, and we realised a very fair sum. Immense was our joy when we carried our treasure triumphantly to Torrini. That worthy man, after listening to all the details of our plot, was half inclined to scold us for our secrecy, but he could not find heart to do so. He thanked us most heartily, and we began to set matters straight again, as our master was now convalescent, and could attend to his own business. Torrini paid all his creditors in full, purchased two horses, and, having nothing further to do at Aubusson, he determined on starting.

The moment of our separation had arrived, and my old friend had been arming himself for it during seve-

ral days. The parting was painful to us all; a father quitting his son, without hope of ever seeing him again, could not have displayed more violent grief than did Torrini when pressing me in his arms for the last time. I, too, felt inconsolable at the loss of two friends with whom I would so gladly have passed my life.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Prodigal Son—Mademoiselle Houdin—I go to Paris—My Marriage—Comte—Studies of the Public—A skilful Manager—Rose-coloured Tickets—A musky Style—The King of Hearts—Ventriloquism—The Mystifiers mystified—Father Roujol—Jules de Rovère—Origin of the word *prestidigitateur*.

How my heart beat when I returned to my native town! I felt as if I had been absent an age, and yet it was only six months. The tears stood in my eyes as I embraced father and mother: I was stifled with emotion. I have since made long journeys in foreign countries; I have always returned to my family safely, but never, I can declare, have I been so profoundly affected as on this occasion. Perhaps it is the same with this impression as with so many others, habit at last renders it flat.

I found my father very quiet on my account, for I had employed a trick to ease his mind. A watchmaker of my acquaintance had sent him my letters, as if from Angers, and he had also forwarded me the replies. Still, I must furnish some reason for my return, and I hesitated about describing my stay with

Torrini. At length, however, urged by that desire, common to all travellers, of narrating their travelling impressions, I gave an account of my adventures, even to their minutest details.

My mother, frightened, and thinking I was still brain-struck, did not await the end of my narrative to send for a physician, who reassured her by stating, what my face indeed confirmed, that I was in a state of perfect health.

It may be thought, perhaps, that I have dwelt too long on the events that followed my poisoning; but I was compelled to do so, for the experience I acquired from Torrini, his history, and our conversations, had a considerable influence on my future life. Before that period my inclination for conjuring was very vague: from that time it gained a complete mastery over me.

Still, I was bound to wrestle against this feeling with all my energy, for it was not presumable that my father, who had unwillingly yielded to my passion for watchmaking, would be so weak as to let me try a novel and most singular profession. I could, certainly, take advantage of my being of age, and my own master; but, besides my unwillingness to grieve my father, I reflected, too, that as my fortune was very small, I ought not to risk it without his consent. These reasons induced me to defer, if not renounce, my plans.

Besides, my success at Aubusson had not altered my decided opinion about conjuring, that a man who

wishes to be thought capable of performing incomprehensible things should have attained an age which leaves it to be supposed that his superiority is the result of lengthened study. The public may permit a man of forty to deceive them, but they will not bear it from a young man.

After a few days devoted to killing the fatted calf, I entered the shop of a Blois watchmaker, who set me to work cleaning and brushing. As I have already said, this mechanical and wearisome task reduces the journeyman watchmaker to the level of an automaton. Each day was spent in the same monotonous round, here a spring to repair, there a pin to replace (for cylinder watches were rare at that period), a chain to refasten; lastly, after a cursory examination of the works, a turn of the brush to make all bright again. I am far from wishing to run down the trade of a repairing watchmaker, and I can always honour the skill employed in repairing a watch by doing as little as possible.

Sometimes, it may be remarked, a watch comes back from the mender's in as bad a state as when it went. It is true, but with whom is the fault? In my belief, with the public. In the country, more especially, it is impossible to perform repairs conscientiously, for the public bargain about their watch or clock as they would do in buying vegetables. The consequence is, the watchmaker is forced to compound with his conscience, and the customer loses his money.

One thing is certain: I did not like the trade, and I was growing atrociously idle. But if I were cold and indolent as regarded watch repairing, I felt a devouring need for activity in some other department. To satisfy this, I gave myself up entirely to an amusement which delighted me—I became an amateur actor.

No one, I fancy, can blame me for this; for, among those who read my confessions, I am sure there is hardly one who has not performed in some shape. From the boy who recites a speech at the school distribution of prizes, up to the old gentleman who often accepts the part of "heavy father" at one of those agreeable parties arranged on long winter evenings, not one but enjoys the sweet satisfaction of being applauded. I, too, had this weakness; and, urged on by my travelling recollections, I wished to appear once more before the public, who had already treated me so kindly.

Some young friends joined me in forming a light comedy company, and I had the pleasure of performing all Perlet's parts in the most fashionable pieces of the day. Our performance was gratis: hence, I need not say we had crowded audiences. Of course, too, we were all wonderful actors—at least, people told us so—and our gratified self-love found no cause for refusing their praise.

Unfortunately for our brilliant success, rivalry and wounded feelings, as so frequently happens, produced

discord among us, and at last only the hairdresser and candle-snuffer were left of our goodly company. These two faithful followers, finding themselves thus abandoned, held a council, and, after mature deliberation, decided that they would accept each other's resignation, as they could not perform alone. In order to explain the heroic persistency of these two artistes, I may as well state they were the only persons paid for their services.

My father regretted to see me leave work for pleasure, and, in order to bring me back to healthy ideas, he formed a plan which must have the double advantage of improving my conduct, and tying me down to his side: in short, he meant to establish me in business, and make me marry.

I do not know—or, rather, I will not say—why I declined the latter proposal, under the pretext that I felt no inclination for marriage. As for my beginning business, I easily made my father understand that I was too young even to dream of it. But I had hardly intimated my refusal, when a very simple circumstance entirely changed my views, and made me forget all my oaths of fidelity to a certain party.

The success my acting had met with procured me admission to certain salons, where I often spent an agreeable evening; for acting went on here, too, in the shape of charades.

One evening, we were requested, as usual, to enliven the visitors by one of our proverbs. I do not

remember the word proposed; I only know I was chosen to fill the part of a bachelor gourmet. I sat down to table, and while indulging in a meal like those usually served up at a theatre, I improvised a warm defence of celibacy. This apology was all the more easy to me, as I needed only to repeat the fine arguments I had employed to my father about his double proposition. Now, it happened that, among the persons listening to this description of the blessings of celibacy, was a young lady of seventeen, who inclined a serious ear to my arguments against marriage. It was the first time I had met her; so I could not ascribe any other reason for her fixed attention than her desire to detect the word.

A man is always delighted to find an attentive listener, more especially when it is a pretty young girl: hence, I thought it my bounden duty to make some polite remarks to her during the course of the evening. A conversation ensued, and became so interesting, that we had a great deal still to say to each other when the hour came for separation, and I believe the regret at parting was not felt by myself alone.

This simple event was, however, the cause of my marriage with Mademoiselle Houdin, and this marriage took me to Paris. The reader will now understand why my name is Robert-Houdin; but I have also to add that this double name, which I at first assumed to distinguish me from my numerous homo-

nymes, eventually became my patronymic, by a decision of the council of state. I may be pardoned for remarking that this favour, always so difficult to obtain, was granted me in consideration of the popularity my long and laborious toil had gained me while using that name.

My father-in-law, M. Houdin, a celebrated watchmaker, was a native of Blois, and had gone to Paris, as a better field for his talents. He was now engaged in the wholesale clock trade, while making, with his own hands, astronomical clocks, chronometers, and regulators. It was agreed that we should live together, and that I should help him in his business.

M. Houdin was quite as fond as myself of everything appertaining to mechanism, and was thoroughly versed in the subject. Hence, we had long and interesting conversations on the topic, and at the end of one of these I confided to him my scheme of setting up a room for the display of mechanical toys and sleight-of-hand tricks. M. Houdin understood me, adopted my plans, and urged me to carry on my studies in the path I had chosen. Proud of the approbation of a man with whose extreme prudence I was acquainted, I gave myself up seriously, during my leisure hours, to my favourite exercises, and began by contriving some instruments for my future cabinet.

My first care, on arriving at Paris, was to attend a performance of Comte's, who had long lorded it in his theatre at the Gallery Choiseul. This celebrated

professor was now resting on his laurels, and only performed once a week. The other evenings were devoted to the performances of his young actors, who were perfect prodigies.

Many of my readers will remember his bills, with their singular announcement of the principal parts performed by M. ARTHUR, aged 5; MADEMOISELLE ADELINA, aged 4½; MADEMOISELLE VICTORINE, aged 7; little VICTOR, aged 6. These baby actors attracted the whole of Paris.

Comte might have left the stage entirely, and contented himself with being manager and dry-nurse to these children of Thalia, for he possessed a very comfortable fortune; but he made it a point to appear at least once a week, from a double motive: his performances, owing to their rarity, always exercised a beneficial effect on the receipts; and, on the other hand, by continuing to act he prevented other professors of conjuring setting up in opposition to him.

Comte's tricks were all drawn from the same repertory I knew by heart; hence they had no great interest for me; still I derived some profit from attending his performances, for I was enabled to study the audience.

I listened attentively to all said around me, and often heard very judicious remarks. These being generally made by persons not apparently gifted with great penetration, led me to the conclusion that the conjuror ought to distrust plain mother wit, and I

worked out the problem to my own satisfaction: "that it is easier to dupe a clever man than an ignorant one."

This seems to be a paradox; but I will explain it.

The ordinary man only sees in conjuring tricks a challenge offered to his intelligence, and hence representations of sleight of hand become to him a combat in which he determines on conquering. Ever on his guard against the honeyed words by means of which the illusion is produced, he hears nothing, and shuts himself up in this inflexible reasoning:

"The conjuror," he says, "holds in his hand an object, which he pretends he makes disappear. Well, whatever he may say to distract my attention, my eyes shall not leave his hand, and the trick cannot be done without my finding out how he manages it."

It follows that the conjuror, whose artifices are principally directed to the mind, must double his address to delude this obstinate resistance.

The clever man, on the contrary, when he visits a conjuring performance, only goes to enjoy the illusions, and, far from offering the performer the slightest obstacle, he is the first to aid him. The more he is deceived the more he is pleased, for that is what he paid for. He knows, too, that these amusing deceptions cannot injure his reputation as an intelligent man, and hence he yields to the professor's arguments, follows them through all their developments, and allows himself to be easily put off the right scent.

Is not my problem proved?

Comte was also an object of interesting study to me, both as manager and as artist. As manager, Comte could have challenged the most skilful to a comparison, and he was a famous hand at bringing grist to his mill. The little schemes a manager employs to attract the public and increase his receipts are tolerably well known; but Comte, for a long time, did not require to have recourse to them, as his room was always crowded. At length the day arrived when the benches allowed some elbow room; then he invented his "family tickets," his "medals," his "reserved boxes for the prize-holders at schools and colleges," &c. &c.

The family tickets gave admission to four persons at half price. Though all Paris was inundated with them, every one into whose hands one of these tickets came believed himself specially favoured by Comte, and none failed to respond to his appeal. What the manager lost in quality he amply regained in quantity.

But Comte did not stop here; he also wished that his *rose-coloured tickets* (the name he gave his family tickets) should bring him a small pecuniary profit, as compensation for reduced prices. He therefore offered each person who presented one of these tickets a copper medal, on which his name was engraved, and asked in exchange the sum of one penny. Suppose the ticket-holder declined, he was not admitted, and when matters came to that pass, people always paid.

It may be said that a penny was a trifle; but with this

trifle Comte paid for his lights; at least he said so, and he may be believed.

During the holidays the pink tickets disappeared, and made room for those reserved for the school prize boys, which were far more productive than the others, for what parents could deny their sons the acceptance of M. Comte's invitation, when they could promise themselves the extreme pleasure of seeing their beloved boys in a box exclusively occupied by *crowned heads?* The parents, consequently, accompanied their children, and for a gratis ticket the manager netted six or seven fold the value of his graceful liberality.

I could mention many other ways Comte augmented his receipts by, but I will only allude to one more.

If you arrived a little late, and the length of the *queue* made you fear the places would be all taken, you had only to enter a small café adjoining the theatre, and opening into the Rue Ventadour. You paid a trifle more for your cup of coffee or your glass of liqueur, but you were quite sure that before the public were admitted the waiter would open a secret door, allowing you to reach the paying-place in comfort and choose your seat. In fact, Comte's café was a true box-office, except that the spectator received something in return for the sum usually charged for reserving seats.

As artist, Comte possessed the double talent of ventriloquism and sleight of hand. His tricks were performed skilfully and with a good share of dash, while

his performances generally pleased, for the ladies were treated most gallantly. My readers may judge for themselves from the following trick, which I believe was his own invention, and which always pleased me when I saw it.

This experiment was called "The Birth of the Flowers," and it began with a short address in the shape of agreeable pleasantry.

"Ladies," the professor said, "I propose on the present occasion to make twelve of you disappear from the pit, twenty from the first circle, and seventy-two from the second."

After the burst of laughter this pleasantry always produced, Comte added: "Reassure yourselves, gentlemen; in order not to deprive you of the most graceful ornament of this room, I will not perform this experiment till the end of the evening." This compliment, spoken very modestly, was always excellently received.

Comte proceeded to perform the trick in this way:

After sowing seeds in some earth contained in a small cup, he spread over this earth some burning liquid and covered it with a bell, which, as he said, was intended to concentrate the heat and stimulate vegetation. In fact, a few seconds later, a bouquet of varied flowers appeared in the cup. Comte distributed them among the ladies who graced the boxes, and during this distribution contrived to "plant" the following graceful remarks: "Madam, I keep a pansy

(*pensée*) for you.—It will be my care, gentlemen, that you find no cares (*soucis*) here.—Mademoiselle, here is a rose which you have forced to blush with jealousy."

Before long the little bouquet was exhausted, but suddenly the conjuror's hands were liberally filled with flowers. Then, with an air of triumph, he exclaimed, displaying the flowers which had come as if by enchantment:

"I promised to metamorphose all these ladies: could I choose a form more graceful and pleasing? In metamorphosing you all into roses, I am only offering a copy for the original. Tell me, gentlemen, have I not succeeded?"

These gallant words were always greeted by a salvo of applause.

On another occasion, Comte, while offering a rose and a pansy to a lady, said: "I find you here, madam, exactly depicted. The rose represents your freshness and beauty; the pansy your wit and talent."

He also said, in allusion to the ace of hearts, which he had "passed" on one of the most beautiful women in the room: "Will you be kind enough, madam, to lay your hand on your heart? You have only one heart, I presume? Pardon my indiscreet question; but it was necessary; for, though you have only one heart, you might possess them all."

Comte was equally gallant towards sovereigns.

At the end of a performance he gave at the Tuileries, before Louis XVIII., he invited his majesty to

select a card from the pack. It may be that chance led the king to draw his majesty of arts; it may be, though, that the conjuror's address produced this result. During this time, a servant placed on an isolated table a vase filled with flowers.

Comte next took a pistol loaded with powder, in which he inserted the king of hearts as a wad; then, turning to his august spectator, he begged him to fix his eye on the vase, as the card would appear just over it. The pistol was fired, and the bust of Louis XVIII. appeared among the flowers.

The king, not knowing how to explain this unexpected result, asked Comte the meaning of this strange apparition, adding, in a slightly sarcastic tone,

"I fancy, sir, that your trick has not ended as you stated."

"I beg your majesty's pardon," Comte replied, assuming the manner of a courtier; "I have quite kept my promise. I pledged myself that the king of hearts should appear on that vase, and I appeal to all Frenchmen whether that bust does not represent the king of all hearts?"

It may be easily supposed that this trick was heartily applauded by the audience. In fact, the *Royal Journal* of the 20th December, 1814, thus describes the end of the performance:

"The whole audience exclaimed, in reply to M. Comte, 'We recognise him—it is he—the king of all hearts! the beloved of the French—of the whole

universe — Louis XVIII., the august grandson of Henri Quatre!'

"The king, much affected by these warm acclamations, complimented M. Comte on his skill.

"'It would be a pity,' he said to him, 'to order such a talented sorcerer to be burnt alive. You have caused us too much pleasure for us to cause you pain. Live many years for yourself, in the first place, and then for us.'"

But though Comte was so amiable to ladies, he was pitiless to gentlemen. It would be a long story were I to describe all the spiteful allusions and mystifications to which his masculine spectators were exposed. For instance, there was his ace of hearts trick, which he ended by producing aces from every part of his victim's body, who knew not what saint to implore in order to stop this avalanche of cards. Then, again, there was the bald-headed gentleman who had politely lent his hat, and received a volley of compliments of the following nature:

"This article must belong to you," said Comte, drawing a wig from the hat. "Aha, sir! it appears you are a family man. Here are socks—then a bib—a chemise—a charming little frock," and, as the public laughed heartily, "on my faith, a goody-two-shoes!" he added, producing a pair of shoes. "Nothing is wanting for the dress—not even the stays and their laces. I suppose, sir, you thought you could stay my tongue when you placed that article in your hat."

Ventriloquism added a great charm to Comte's performances, as it gave rise to numerous little scenes that produced a striking effect. This faculty too often suggested to him curious mystifications, the best of them (if such a thing can ever be good) being reserved for his travels, when they served as a puff of his performances, and helped to attract crowds.

At Tours, for instance, he induced the people to break in four doors, in order to rescue an unhappy man supposed to be dying of hunger. At Nevers he renewed the miracle of Balaam's ass, by causing a donkey that was weary of its master's weight, to lift up its voice in complaint. One night, too, he caused a profound consternation in a diligence, for a dozen brigands were heard at the doors shouting, "Money, or your life!" The terrified passengers hastened to hand their purses and watches to Comte, who offered to treat with the robbers, and they retired apparently satisfied with their spoil. The passengers were glad to have escaped so cheaply, and the next morning, to their still greater satisfaction, the ventriloquist returned them the tribute they had paid to their fears, and explained to them the talent by which they had been duped.

Another time, at Mâcon fair, he saw a countrywoman driving a pig before her, which could hardly move, so laden was it with fat.

"What's the price of your pig, my good woman?"

"A hundred francs, my good-looking gentleman, at your service, if you wish to buy."

"Of course I wish to buy; but it is a great deal too much: I can offer you ten crowns."

"I want one hundred francs, no more and no less: take it or leave it."

"Stay," Comte said, approaching the animal; "I am sure your pig is more reasonable than you. Tell me, on your conscience, my fine fellow, are you worth one hundred francs?"

"You are a long way out," the pig replied, in a hoarse and hollow voice; "I'm not worth one hundred pence. I am meazled, and my mistress is trying to take you in."

The crowd that had assembled round the woman and pig fell back in terror, fancying them both bewitched, while Comte returned to his hotel, where the story was told him with sundry additions, and he learned that some courageous persons had gone up to the woman, begged her to be exorcised, and thus drive the unclean spirit out of the pig.

Still, Comte did not always escape so easily; and he almost paid dearly for a trick he played on some peasants at Fribourg, in Switzerland. These fanatics took him for a real sorcerer, and attacked him with sticks; and they were even going to throw him into a lime-kiln, had not Comte escaped by causing a terrible voice to issue from the kiln, which routed them.

I will end my account of these amusing adventures with a little anecdote, in which Comte and myself were in turn mystifier and mystified.

The celebrated ventriloquist paid me a visit at the Palais Royal, and I accompanied him to the foot of the stairs on his departure. Comte walked down before me, still talking, so that the pockets of his coat were at my mercy. The opportunity was too good to neglect the chance of playing a trick on my talented *confrère*, so I filched his handkerchief and a handsome gold snuff-box: and I took care to turn the pocket inside out, as a proof that my performance had been properly executed.

I was laughing at the comic result my trick must have when I returned Comte his property; but it was "diamond cut diamond:" for, while I was thus violating the laws of hospitality, Comte was scheming against me. I had scarce concealed the handkerchief and box, when I heard a strange voice on the first floor landing.

"Monsieur Robert-Houdin, will you be kind enough to step up to the box-office: I wish to speak to you."

My readers will guess that the ventriloquist had played me a trick; indeed, on reaching the office, I only found the clerk, who could not understand what I was talking about. I perceived, too late, that I was victimised, and I heard Comte celebrating his victory by shouts of laughter. For a moment, I confess I felt vexed at having been taken in, but I soon regained

my equanimity on thinking I might have the best of it yet. So I went down stairs very calmly.

"What did that person want?" Comte asked, with ill repressed delight.

"Can't you guess?"

"I?—no."

"It was a penitent thief, who begged me to return you the articles he had filched from you. Here they are, my master!"

"I prefer it to end so!" Comte said, returning his pocket to its place. "We are now quits, and I hope we shall always be good friends."

From all the preceding remarks it may be concluded that the fundamental principles of Comte's performances were mystifying gentlemen (sovereigns excepted), complimenting ladies, and jesting with everybody. Comte was right in employing these means, as he generally gained his object; for he delighted and raised a laugh. At this period French manners justified such behaviour, and the professor, by flattering the taste and instincts of the public, was sure to please.

There has been a great change since, and puns are no longer held in such esteem; banished from good society, they have sought refuge in studios, when the pupils too often make an immoderate use of them, and though they may be permitted now and then among intimate friends, they are not proper in a performance of sleight of hand. The reason is very simple: not only do puns raise a belief that the artist fancies himself a

wit, which may be injurious to him; but, if he succeed in raising a laugh, it weakens the interest felt in his experiments.

It is a recognised fact that, in those performances where imagination plays the chief part, "astonishment is a hundred-fold better than a silly laugh;" for, though the mind may remember what has delighted it, laughter leaves no trace on the memory.

Symbolical or complimentary language is also completely out of fashion, at least the age does not err in excess of gallantry, and "musky" compliments would be badly received in public. I have always thought, too, that ladies visit a performance like mine in order to refresh their minds, and not to be put in evidence themselves. They possibly prefer to remain simple lookers-on rather than expose themselves to florid compliments.

As for mystification, a more powerful pen than mine must undertake its apology.

In saying this, I have no wish to cast censure on Comte. I am writing at this moment in accordance with the spirit of my age; Comte acted in accordance with his; we both succeeded, though differing in our treatment, and this only proves that "all styles are good except that which is wearisome."

These performances of Comte's, however, inflamed my imagination; I only dreamed of theatres, conjuring, mechanism, automata, &c.; I was impatient to take my place among the adepts of magic, and make myself a

name in the marvellous art. The time I required in forming a determination seemed to me so much stolen from my future success. My success! I did not know what trials I should undergo ere I merited it. I had no suspicion of the toil, the care, and trouble which I should have to pay for it.

Still, I resolved on continuing my studies of automata and instruments suited to produce magical illusions. Though I had seen many of them while with Torrini, I had many more to learn, for the stock of conjuring tricks in those days was enormous. Fortunately I found an opportunity of materially abridging my studies.

I had noticed, while passing along the Rue Richelieu, a modest little shop, in front of which conjuring apparatus was exposed for sale. This was a piece of good luck, so I bought some of the things, and while paying repeated visits to the master of the shop, under pretext of asking information, I got into his good graces, and he grew to look on me as a friend.

Father Roujol (such was his name) was perfectly acquainted with his trade, and he held the confidence of every conjuror of note; hence, he could give me much valuable information, so I became more polite than ever, and the worthy man soon initiated me into all his mysteries. But my repeated visits to the shop had another object as well, for I wished to meet some of the masters of the art who could increase my knowledge.

Unfortunately, my old friend's shop was not so visited

as before. The revolution of 1830 had turned persons' ideas to more serious matters than "physical amusements," and the greater number of conjurors had wandered into strange countries. Old Roujol's good times had, therefore, passed away, which rendered him very gloomy.

"Things are not as they used to be," he would say, "and it might really be fancied the jugglers had juggled themselves away, for I don't see a single one. Will the time ever return," he added, "when the Duc de M—— did not disdain to visit my humble shop, and remain here for hours talking to me and my numerous visitors. Ah, that was a time! when all the first conjurors and amateurs formed a brilliant club here; for each of these masters, desirous of proving his superiority over the others, showed his best tricks and his utmost skill."

I felt the old gentleman's regret equally with himself, for I should have revelled in such society, as I would have walked any time twenty leagues for the sake of talking with a professor. Still, I had the luck to form here the acquaintance of Jules de Rovère, the first to employ a title now generally given to fashionable conjurors. Being of noble birth, he desired a title in accordance with it; but, as he had rejected with disdain the vulgar name of *escamoteur*, and as, too, that of *physicien* was frequently used by his rivals, he was compelled to create a title for himself.

One day the pompous title of "PRESTIDIGITATEUR"

was visible on an enormous poster, which also condescended to supply the derivation of this breath-stopping word, *presto digiti* (activity of the fingers). Then came the details of the performance, intermingled with Latin quotations, which must attract the attention of the public by evidencing the learning of the conjuror—I beg pardon, prestidigitator.

This word, as well as *prestidigitation*, due to the same author, were soon seized upon by Jules de Rovère's rivals, who liked a good mouthful too. The Academy itself followed this example by sanctioning the formation of the word, and thus handing it down to posterity. I am bound to add, though, that this word, originally so pompous, is no longer a distinction, for, as the most humble jugglers were at liberty to appreciate it, it follows that conjuring and prestidigitation have become synonymous. The conjuror who requires a title should seek it in his own merit, and recognise the sound truth that "it is better for a man to honour his profession than to be honoured by it." For my own part, I never made any distinction between the two names, and shall employ them indiscriminately, until some new Jules de Rovère arrive to enrich the Dictionary of the French Academy.

CHAPTER IX.

Celebrated Automata—A Brazen Fly—The Artificial Man—Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas d'Aquinas—Vaucanson—His Duck—His Flute-Player—Curious Details—The Automaton Chess-Player—Interesting Episode—Catherine II. and M. de Kempelen—I repair the Componium—Unexpected Success.

OWING to my persevering researches I had nothing left to learn in conjuring; but, in order to carry out my scheme, I had to study the principles of a science on which I greatly depended for the success of my future performances. I allude to the science, or rather art, of making automata.

While occupied with this idea I made active investigations; I applied to the public libraries and their keepers, whom my tenacious importunity drove into despair. But all the information I collected only brought me descriptions of mechanical toys, far less ingenious than certain playthings of the present day, or absurd statements of chefs-d'œuvre published in the dark ages. My readers may judge from the following:

I found, in a work bearing the title "Apologie pour les Grands Homines Accusés de Magie," that "Jean de Mont-royal presented to the Emperor Charles V. an iron fly, which made a solemn circuit round its inventor's head, and then reposed from its fatigue on his arm." Such a fly is rather extraordinary, yet I have something better to tell my readers—still about a fly.

Gervais, Chancellor to the Emperor Otho III., in his book entitled "Otia Imperatoris," informs us that "the sage Virgilius, Bishop of Naples, made a brass fly, which he placed on one of the city gates, and that this mechanical fly, trained like a shepherd's dog, prevented any other fly entering Naples; so much so, that during eight years the meat exposed for sale in the market was never once tainted."

How much should we regret that this marvellous automaton has not survived to our day? How the butchers, and still more their customers, would thank the learned bishop! Pass we to another marvel:

Francis Picus relates that "Roger Bacon, aided by Thomas Bungey, his brother in religion, after having rendered their bodies equal and tempered by chemistry, employed the Speculum Amuchesi to construct a brazen head which should tell them if there were any mode of enclosing the whole of England by a high wall. They forged at it for seven years without relaxation, but misfortune willed it that when the head spoke the two

monks did not hear it, as they were engaged on something else."

I have asked myself a hundred times how the two intrepid blacksmiths knew the head had spoken, when they were not present to hear it. I never discovered any other solution than this: it was, doubtlessly, *because their bodies were equalised and tempered by chemistry.*

But here is a far more astounding marvel.

Tostat, in his "Commentaires sur l'Enode," states that "Albertus Magnus, Provincial of the Dominicans at Cologne, constructed a brass man, which he worked at continually for thirty years. This work was performed *under various constellations* and *according to the laws of perspective.*"

When the sun was in the sign of the Zodiac the eyes of this automaton melted metals, on which the characters of the same sign were traced. This intelligent machine was equally gifted with motion and speech, and it revealed to Albertus Magnus some of his most important secrets.* Unfortunately, St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus's pupil, taking this statue for the handiwork of the devil, smashed it with a big stick.

As a finale to these fables, which are well fitted to

* "Les Secrets du Grand Albert," a work crammed with absurdities, and falsely attributed to Albertus Magnus.

figure among the marvels performed by Perrault's fairies, I will quote from page 252 of the "Journal des Savants" for 1677: "The artificial man of Reysolius, a statue so resembling the human form, that, with the exception of the operations of the soul, everything that takes place in the body may be witnessed."

What a pity the mechanician stopped so soon! for it would have cost him so little, while making so exquisite a resemblance to the fairest work of the Creator, to add to his automaton a soul moving by clockwork!

This quotation does much honour to the savants who accepted the responsibility of such a statement, and is a further proof how history is written.

It may be easily supposed these works furnished me no guide to the art I so much wished to study; and although I continued my inquiries, I only attained the unsatisfactory result that nothing serious had been written on the subject of automata.

"What!" I said to myself, "can it be possible that the marvellous science which raised Vaucanson's name so high—the science whose ingenious combinations can animate inert matter, and impart to it a species of existence—is the only one without its archives?"

When about to give up the subject in despair, I stumbled on a memoir of the inventor of the "Automaton Duck." This memoir, bearing date 1738, is addressed by the author to the members of the Aca-

demy of Sciences. In it will be found a learned description of his flute-player, as well as a report of the Academy, which I here transcribe.

Extract from the Registers of the Royal Academy of Sciences for April 30, 1738:

"The Academy, after hearing M. de Vaucanson's memoir read, containing a description of a wooden statue, copied from Coysvoix's marble fawn, which plays twelve different airs on a German flute with a precision deserving of public attention, was of opinion that this machine was extremely ingenious; that the inventor had employed novel and simple means both to give the fingers the necessary motion and to modify the wind entering the flute, by augmenting or diminishing its velocity, according to the various tones; by varying the arrangement of the lips, and setting a valve in motion to perform the functions of the tongue; lastly, by artificially imitating all that a man is obliged to do; and that, in addition, M. de Vaucanson's memoir possessed all the clearness and perception such matter is capable of, proving the intelligence of the author, and his great knowledge of the different branches of mechanism. In confirmation of which I have signed the present certificate.

"FONTENELLE,

"Perpetual Secretary, Royal Academy of Sciences.

"Paris, May 3, 1738."

After this report comes a letter of Vaucanson's addressed to the Abbé D. F., in which he informs him of his intention of presenting to the public on Easter Monday—

1. A player of the German flute.
2. A player of the tambourinē.
3. An artificial duck.

"In this duck," the celebrated automatist writes, "will be noticed the mechanism of the viscera, intended to perform the functions of eating, drinking, and digesting. The action of all the parts is exactly imitated. The bird puts out its head to take up the seed, swallows it, digests it, and evacuates it by the ordinary channels.

"All thoughtful persons will understand the difficulty of making my automaton perform so many different movements, as when it stands on its legs and moves its head to the right and left. They will also see that this animal drinks, dabbles with its bill, quacks like the living duck, and, in short, is precisely similar in every respect."

I was the more surprised at the contents of the memoir, as it was the first trustworthy information I had gained about automata. The description of the flute-player gave me a high opinion of the inventor's talent; but I much regretted finding so short an account of the mechanical combinations of the duck.

For a time, I contented myself with admiring and believing in the great master's work, but, in 1844, Vaucanson's duck was exhibited in a room at the Palais Royal.* Of course I was one of the first to visit it, and was much struck by its skilful and learned formation. Some time after, one of the wings having been injured, the duck was sent me to repair, and I was initiated into the famous mystery of digestion. To my great surprise, I found that the illustrious master had not disdained to have recourse to a trick which a conjuror would have been proud of. The digestion, so pompously announced in the memoir, was only a mystification—a real *canard*, in fact. Decidedly, Vaucanson was not only my master in mechanism, but I must bow before his genius for juggling.

The trick was as simple as it was interesting. A vase, containing seed steeped in water, was placed before the bird. The motion of the bill in dabbling crushed the food, and facilitated its introduction into a pipe placed beneath the lower bill. The water and seed thus swallowed fell into a box placed under the bird's stomach, which was emptied every three or four days. The other part of the operation was thus

* After Vaucanson's death, his works were dispersed and lost, with the exception of the duck, which, after remaining for a long time in a garret at Berlin, saw light again in 1840, and was purchased by a M. George Tiets, who spent four years in repairing it.

effected: Bread-crumb, coloured green, was expelled by a forcing pump, and carefully caught on a silver salver as the result of artificial digestion. This was handed round to be admired, while the ingenious trickster laughed in his sleeve at the credulity of the public. But, before leaving this subject, I must give a short biographical notice of this illustrious man.

Jacques de Vaucanson was born at Grenôble on the 24th February, 1709, of a noble family, and his taste for mechanism was developed at an early age. In 1730, the flute-player at the Tuileries suggested to him the idea of constructing on this model an automaton which should really play the flute, and he spent four years in perfecting it. The story runs that Vaucanson's valet was the only person acquainted with his secret, and at the first notes produced by the flute-player, the faithful servant fell at his master's feet, as if he were more than mortal, and they embraced with tears of joy.

The duck and tambourine-player soon followed, and were chiefly intended to speculate on public curiosity. Though noble by birth, Vaucanson exhibited his automata at the fair of Saint Germain and at Paris, where his receipts were enormous. He is also said to have invented a loom on which a donkey worked cloth; this he made in revenge upon the silk-weavers of Lyons, who had stoned him because he attempted to simplify

the ordinary loom. We also owe to Vaucanson a chain that still bears his name, and a machine to make meshes of equal size.

It is also said he invented for the performance of Marmontel's *Cleopatra* an asp which fastened itself with a hiss on the bosom of the actress who played the principal character. On the first performance of the tragedy, a jester, more struck by the hissing of the automaton than by the beauty of the tragedy, exclaimed, "I am of the asp's opinion!"

This illustrious mechanician retained all his activity to the last moment of his life. While dangerously ill, he devoted himself to his machine for making his endless chain.

"Do not lose a minute," he said to his workmen; "I fear I may not live long enough to explain my idea thoroughly."

Eight days later, on the 21st of November, 1782, he died, at the age of seventy-three; but, before leaving this world, he had the consolation of seeing his machine at work.

One piece of good luck never arrives without another; thus, in 1844, I also saw at the house of a mechanician of the name of Cronier, at Belleville, the famous *Chess-player*, who defeated the whole chess world. I never saw it at work, but since then I have received some information about the automaton of a certain degree of

interest, and I trust my readers will feel the same surprise as I did when I heard it.

My story commences in Russia: the first division of Poland in 1792 had produced a certain fermentation, the effects of which were felt some years later. In 1796, a revolt broke out in a half-Russian, half-Polish regiment stationed at Riga, at the head of the rebels being an officer of the name of Worousky, a man of great talent and energy. He was of short stature, but well built; and he exercised such influence, that the troops sent to suppress the revolt were beaten back with considerable loss. However, reinforcements came from St. Petersburg, and the insurgents were defeated in a pitched battle. A great number perished, and the rest took to flight across the marshes, where the soldiers pursued them, with orders to grant no quarter.

In this rout Worousky had both thighs shattered by a cannon-ball, and fell on the battle-field; however, he escaped from the general massacre by throwing himself into a ditch behind a hedge. At nightfall, Worousky dragged himself along with great difficulty to the adjacent house of a physician of the name of Osloff, whose benevolence was well known, and the doctor, moved by his sufferings, attended upon, and promised to conceal, him. His wound was serious, but the doctor felt confident of curing him, until gangrene set in, and his life could only be saved at the cost of

half his body. The amputation was successful, and Worousky saved.

During this time, M. de Kempelen, a celebrated Viennese mechanician, came to Russia to pay a visit to M. Osloff, with whom he had been long acquainted. He was travelling about to learn foreign languages, the study of which he afterwards displayed in his splendid work on the "Mechanism of Words," published at Vienna in 1791. M. de Kempelen stopped a short time in every country the language of which he desired to learn, and his aptitude was so great that he acquired it very speedily.

This visit was the more agreeable to the doctor, as for some time he had been alarmed as to the consequences of the noble action he had performed; he feared being compromised if it were found out, and his embarrassment was extreme, for, living alone with an old housekeeper, he had no one to consult or to help him. Hence, he told M. de Kempelen his secret, and begged his aid. Though at first startled by sharing such a secret—for he knew that a reward was offered for the insurgent chief, and that the act of humanity he was about to help in might send him to Siberia—still, M. de Kempelen, on seeing Worousky's mutilated body, felt moved with compassion, and began contriving some plan to secure his escape.

Dr. Osloff was a passionate lover of chess, and had played numerous games with his patient during his tardy convalescence; but Worousky was so strong at the game that the doctor was always defeated. Then Kempelen joined the doctor in trying to defeat the skilful player, but it was of no use; Worousky was always the conqueror. His superiority gave M. de Kempelen the idea of the famous Automaton Chess-player. In an instant his plan was formed, and he set to work immediately. The most remarkable circumstance is, that this wonderful chef-d'œuvre, which astonished the whole world, was invented and finished within three months.

M. de Kempelen was anxious his host should make the first essay of his automaton; so, he invited him to play a game on the 10th of October, 1796. The automaton represented a Turk of the natural size, wearing the national costume, and seated behind a box of the shape of a chest of drawers. In the middle of the top of the box was a chess-board.

Prior to commencing the game, the artist opened several doors in the chest, and M. Osloff could see inside a large number of wheels, pulleys, cylinders, springs, &c., occupying the larger part. At the same time, he opened a long drawer, from which he produced the chessmen and a cushion, on which the Turk

was to rest his arm. This examination ended, the robe of the automaton was raised, and the interior of the body could also be inspected.

The doors being then closed, M. de Kempelen wound up one of the wheels with a key he inserted in a hole in the chest; after which the Turk, with a gentle nod of salutation, placed his hand on one of the pieces, raised it, deposited it on another square, and laid his arm on the cushion before him. The inventor had stated that, as the automaton could not speak, it would signify check to the king by three nods, and to the queen by two.

The doctor moved in his turn, and waited patiently till his adversary, whose movements had all the dignity of the Sultan he represented, had moved. The game, though slow at first, soon grew animated, and the doctor found he had to deal with a tremendous opponent; for, in spite of all his efforts to defeat the figure, his game was growing quite desperate. It is true, though, that for some minutes past, the doctor's attention had appeared to be distracted, and one idea seemed to occupy him. But while hesitating whether he should impart his thoughts to his friend, the figure gave three nods. The game was over.

"By Jove!" the loser said, with a tinge of vexation, which the sight of the inventor's smiling face soon dispelled, "if I were not certain Worousky is at this

moment in bed, I should believe I had been playing with him. His head alone is capable of inventing such a checkmate. And besides," the doctor said, looking fixedly at M. de Kempelen, "can you tell me why your automaton plays with the left hand, just like Worousky?"*

The mechanician began laughing, and not wishing to prolong this mystification, the prelude to so many others, he confessed to his friend that he had really been playing with Worousky.

"But where the deuce have you put him, then?" the doctor said, looking round to try and discover his opponent.

The inventor laughed heartily.

"Well! do you not recognise me?" the Turk exclaimed, holding out his left hand to the doctor in reconciliation, while Kempelen raised the robe, and displayed the poor cripple stowed away in the body of the automaton.

M. Osloff could no longer keep his countenance, and he joined the others in their laughter. But he was the first to stop, for he wanted an explanation.

"But how do you manage to render Worousky invisible?"

M. de Kempelen then explained how he concealed

* The automaton chess-player always used the left hand—a defect falsely attributed to the carelessness of the constructor.

the living automaton before it entered the Turk's body.

"See here!" he said, opening the chest, "these wheels, pulleys, and cranks occupying a portion of the chest, are only a deception. The frames that support them are hung on hinges, and can be turned back to leave space for the player while you were examining the body of the automaton.

"When this inspection was ended, and as soon as the robe was allowed to fall, Worousky entered the Turk's body we have just examined, and, while I was showing you the box and the machinery, he was taking his time to pass his arms and hands into those of the figure. You can understand that, owing to the size of the neck, which is hidden by the broad and enormous collar, he can easily pass his head into this mask, and see the chess-board. I must add, that when I pretend to wind up the machine, it is only to drown the sound of Worousky's movements."

"Very good, then," the doctor replied, to show he perfectly understood the plan; "while I was examining the chest, my confounded Worousky was in the Turk's body, and when the robe was lifted, he had passed into the chest. I frankly allow," M. Osloff added, "that I was done by this ingenious arrangement; but I console myself with the idea that cleverer persons than I will be deceived."

The three friends were the more delighted by the result of this private rehearsal, as this instrument furnished an excellent means of escape for the poor prisoner, and at the same time assured him a livelihood. The same evening the road by which the frontier should be reached was agreed on, as well as the precautions to be taken during the journey. It was also arranged that, in order to arouse no suspicions, performances should be given in all the towns they passed through, beginning with Toula, Kalouga, Smolensk, &c.

A month later, Worousky, now entirely recovered, gave a first specimen of his marvellous skill to a numerous audience at Toula. I possess a copy of the original bill, which was given me by M. Hessler, nephew of Dr. Osloff, who also supplied me with all these details. Worousky won every game he played at Toula, and the papers were full of praises of the automaton. Assured of success by the brilliancy of their début, M. de Kempelen and his companion proceeded towards the frontier.

It was necessary that Worousky should be concealed from sight somewhere even when travelling; hence he was literally packed up. The enormous chest in which the automaton was conveyed only travelled very slowly, apparently through fear of breaking the machinery, but in reality to protect the skilful chess-player who

was shut up in it, while air-holes were made in the side of this singular post-chaise to enable Worousky to breathe.

The poor cripple endured all this inconvenience calmly, in the hope of soon being out of reach of the Muscovite police, and arriving safe and sound at the end of this painful journey. The fatigue, it must be granted, was considerably alleviated by the enormous receipts they netted by the exhibition.

Our travellers had arrived at Vitebsk, on the road to the Prussian frontier, when one morning Kempelen rushed into the room where Worousky was concealed.

"A frightful misfortune hangs over us," the mechanician said, in a terrible state of alarm, and showing a letter dated St. Petersburg. "Heaven knows how we shall escape it! The Empress Catherine, having heard through the papers of the automaton's wonderful talent, desires to play a game with it, and requests me to bring it straight to the imperial palace. We must hit on some plan to evade this dangerous honour."

To Kempelen's extreme surprise, Worousky heard this great news very calmly, and even seemed to be pleased at it.

"Refuse such a visit!—by no means: the wishes of the Czarina are orders which cannot be infringed without peril; we must, therefore, obey her as quickly as

possible. Your zeal will have the double effect of gaining her favour, and removing any suspicions that might arise about your automaton. Besides," the bold soldier added, with a degree of pride, "I confess I should like to find myself face to face with the great Catherine, and show her that the head on which she set the price of a few roubles is, under certain circumstances, as good as her own."

"Madman that you are!" M. de Kempelen exclaimed, startled by the excitement of the impetuous insurgent. "Remember, that we may be discovered, and you will lose your life, while I shall be sent to Siberia."

"Impossible!" Worousky quietly replied; "your ingenious machine has already deceived so many skilful persons, that I am convinced we shall soon have one dupe more. Besides, what a glorious reminiscence, what an honour it will be to us, if we can say some day that the Empress Catherine II., the haughty Czarina, whom her courtiers proclaim the most intellectual person in her vast empire, was deceived by your genius, and conquered by me!"

Kempelen, though not sharing Worousky's enthusiam, was obliged to yield. Hence, they set off without further argument; the journey was very long and fatiguing, but Kempelen did not quit his companion for a moment, and did all in his power to ameliorate

his position. At length they reached their journey's end, but though they had travelled as fast as they could, Catherine, on receiving Kempelen, appeared rather angry.

"My roads must be very bad, sir, if you require fifteen days to travel from Vitebsk to St. Petersburg."

"Will your majesty," the crafty mechanician replied, "allow me to make a confession which will serve as my excuse?"

"Do so," Catherine replied, "provided it be not a confession of the incapacity of your marvellous machine."

"On the contrary, I would confess that, being aware of your majesty's skill at chess, I desired to offer you a worthy opponent. Hence, before starting, I made some additions which were indispensable for so important a game."

"Ah!" the empress said, with a smile, smoothed down by this flattering explanation. "And you fancy these new arrangements will enable your automaton to beat me?"

"I should be much surprised were it otherwise."

"Well, we shall see, sir," the empress continued, nodding her head ironically. "But," she added, in the same tone, "when will you bring my terrible opponent before me?"

"Whenever your majesty may please."

"If that is the case, I am so impatient to measure my

strength with the conqueror of the most skilful players in my country, that I will receive him this very evening in my library. Put up your machine there, and at eight o'clock I will join you. Be punctual!"

Kempelen took leave of Catherine, and hastened to make his preparations for the evening. Worousky was delighted at the prospect of amusing the empress; but, although Kempelen was resolved to risk the adventure, he wished to take all possible precautions, so that he might have a way of escape in case of danger. Hence, he had the automaton carried to the palace in the same chest in which it travelled.

When eight o'clock struck, the empress, accompanied by a numerous suite, entered the library and took her place at the chess-board.

I have forgotten to say that Kempelen never allowed any one to pass behind the automaton, and would not consent to begin the game till all the spectators were in front of the board.

The court took their places behind the empress, unanimously predicting the defeat of the automaton. The chest and the Turk's body were then examined, and when all were perfectly convinced they contained nothing but the clockwork I have already mentioned, the game began. It proceeded for some time in perfect silence, but Catherine's frowning brow speedily revealed that the automaton was not very gallant

towards her, and fully deserved the reputation it had gained. The skilful Mussulman captured a bishop and a knight, and the game was turning much to the disadvantage of the lady, when the Turk, suddenly forgetting his dignified gravity, gave a violent blow on his cushion, and pushed back a piece his adversary had just moved.

Catherine II. had attempted to cheat; perhaps to try the skill of the automaton, or for some other reason. At any rate, the haughty empress, unwilling to confess her weakness, replaced the piece on the same square, and regarded the automaton with an air of imperious authority. The result was most unexpected — the Turk upset all the pieces with a blow of his hand, and immediately the clockwork, which had been heard during the whole game, stopped. It seemed as if the machinery had got out of repair. Pale and trembling, M. de Kempelen, recognising in this Worousky's impetuous temper, awaited the issue of this conflict between the insurgent and his sovereign.

"Ah, ah! my good automaton! your manners are rather rough," the empress said, good humouredly, not sorry to see a game she had small chance of winning end thus. "Oh! you are a famous player, I grant; but you were afraid of losing the game, and so prudently upset the pieces. Well, I am now quite convinced of your skill and your violent character."

M. de Kempelen began to breathe again, and regaining courage, tried to remove the unfavourable impression which the little respect shown by the automaton must have produced. Hence he said, humbly,

"Will your majesty allow me to offer an explanation of what has just happened?"

"By no means, M. de Kempelen," Catherine said, heartily—"by no means; on the contrary, I find it most amusing, and your automaton pleases me so much, that I wish to purchase it. I shall thus always have near me a player, somewhat quick perhaps, but yet able to hold his own. You can leave it here to-night, and come to me to-morrow morning to arrange the price."

There is strong reason to believe that Catherine wished to commit an indiscretion when she evinced a desire that the figure should remain at the palace till the next morning. Fortunately, the skilful mechanician managed to baffle her feminine curiosity by carrying Worousky off in the big chest. The automaton remained in the library, but the player was no longer there.

The next day Catherine renewed her proposition to purchase the chess-player, but Kempelen made her understand that, as the figure could not perform without him, he could not possibly sell it. The empress allowed the justice of these arguments; and, while

complimenting the mechanician on his invention, made him a handsome present.

Three months after, the automaton was in England, under the management of Mr. Anthon, to whom Kempelen had sold it. I know not if Worousky was still attached to it, but I fancy so, owing to the immense success the chess-player met with. Mr. Anthon visited the whole of Europe, always meeting with the same success; but, at his death, the celebrated automaton was purchased by Maëlzel, who embarked with it for New York. It was then, probably, that Worousky took leave of his hospitable Turk, for the automaton was not nearly so successful in America. After exhibiting his mechanical trumpeter and chess-player for some time, Maëlzel set out again for France, but died on the passage of an attack of indigestion. His heirs sold his apparatus, and thus Cronier obtained his precious relic.

My fortunate star again furnished me with an excellent occasion for continuing my studies. A Prussian of the name of Koppen exhibited at Paris, about the year 1829, an instrument known as the Componium. It was a perfect mechanical orchestra, playing operatic overtures with remarkable precision and effect, and it owed its name to the circumstance that, by means of truly marvellous arrangements, this instrument improvised charming variations without ever repeating itself.

It was asserted to be as difficult to hear the same variation twice, as to find two similar quaternes drawn in succession at the lottery.

The componium was enormously successful, but at last public curiosity was exhausted, and it was withdrawn, after bringing in the owner one hundred thousand francs clear profit in a year. This amount, whether correct or not, was adroitly published, and some time after the instrument was put up for sale. A speculator of the name of D——, seduced by the hope of obtaining equally large receipts in a foreign country, bought the instrument, and took it to England. Unfortunately for D——, at the moment when this goose with the golden eggs arrived in London, George IV. died; the court went into mourning, and no one visited the instrument. In order to avoid useless expense, D—— thought it prudent to give up a scheme commenced under such evil auspices, and determined on returning to Paris. The componium was consequently taken to pieces, packed up, and carried to France.

D—— hoped the instrument would enter duty free, but, on leaving France, he had omitted some formality indispensable before obtaining this favour. The Customs stopped it, and he was obliged to refer the case to the Minister of Trade. While awaiting his decision, the chests were deposited in damp ware-

rooms, and it was not till the end of the year, and after numberless formalities and difficulties, that the instrument returned to Paris.

This will give an idea of the state of disorder, confusion, and damage in which the componium was left.

Discouraged by the ill success of his trip to England, D—— resolved on selling his mechanical improviser, but, before doing so, he cast about for a mechanician who would undertake to put it in working order. I have forgotten to state that, on the sale of the componium, M. Koppen had handed over with it a very clever German workman, who was, as it were, the driver of this gigantic instrument. This person, finding he must sit with his hands before him during the interminable formalities of the French Customs, thought he could not do better than return home.

The repair of the componium was a tedious business —a work of perseverance and research—for, as its arrangement had always been kept secret, no one could supply the least information. D—— himself, having no notion of mechanism, could not be of the slightest use, so the workman must only depend on his own ideas.

I heard the matter talked about, and, urged by a probably too flattering opinion of myself, or, rather, dazzled by the glory of executing such a splendid job, I offered to undertake the immense repairs.

I was laughed at: the confession is humiliating, but perfectly truthful. I must say, too, that it was justifiable, for I was only known at that time as an humble workman, and it was feared that, far from making the instrument act properly, I should cause still greater injury, while trying to repair it. However, as D—— met with no better offer, and I offered to deposit a sum, to be forfeited in the event of my doing any injury, he eventually yielded to my wishes.

It will be allowed that I was a very conscientious workman; but, in reality, I acted for my own benefit, as this undertaking, by supplying me with an interesting object of study, would prove a perfect lesson in mechanism for me.

As soon as my offer was accepted, all the boxes in which the componium was packed were carried into a large room I used as workshop, and emptied, pell-mell, into sheets, spread for the purpose on the ground.

When alone, and I saw this heap of rusty iron, these myriads of parts, whose meaning I did not understand, this orchestra of instruments of every size and shape, such as cornets, bugles, hautboys, flutes, clarionets, bassoons, organ pipes, big drum, triangle, cymbals, &c., all arranged in sizes, according to the chromatic scale, I was so frightened by the difficulty of my task, that I was quite annihilated for several hours.

To better understand my mad presumption, which only my passion for mechanics and my love of the marvellous can excuse, I must add that I never even saw the componium performing; hence, all was an unknown country for me. Add to this, that the greater portion of the works were covered with rust and verdigris.

Seated in the midst of this musical chaos, with my head resting in my hands, I asked myself a hundred times this simple question, "Where shall I begin?" and then my imagination was quite paralysed. One morning, however, finding myself well disposed, and feeling the influence of the Hippocratic axiom, "Mens sana in corpore sano," I felt disgusted at my long sloth, and rushed headforemost at my immense task.

If my readers were only mechanicians, how willingly would I describe to them all my trials, attempts, and studies! With what pleasure I would explain the skilful and ingenious combinations that arose successively from this chaos! But as I fancy I can see my readers turning over my pages to seek the end of a chapter that is growing too serious, I will check my inclination, and content myself with stating that, for a whole year, I proceeded from the known to the unknown, in solving this inextricable problem, and one day I had the happiness of seeing my labours crowned with complete success. The componium — a new phœnix—had risen from its ashes.

This unexpected success gained me the greatest praise, and D—— bade me name my own price; but I would not accept anything beyond my actual outlay, feeling amply repaid by such a glorious result. And yet, however high my reward might have been, it would not have repaid me what this task, which overtasked my strength, eventually cost me.

CHAPTER X.

An Inventor's Calculations—One Hundred Thousand Francs a Year by an Inkstand: Deception—My new Automata—The First Magician in France: Decadence—I meet Antonio—Bosco—The Trick with the Cups—An Execution—Resurrection of the Criminals—Mistake in a Head—The Canary rewarded.

My sleepless nights, my incessant toil, and, above all, the feverish agitations resulting from all the emotions of such an arduous undertaking, had undermined my health. A brain-fever attacked me, and though I recovered from it, it was only to pass five long years in listlessness and vacuity. My mind seemed quite gone: I felt no passion, no love, no interest, even in the arts I had so delighted in: conjuring and mechanism only existed for me in the shape of recollections.

But this illness, which had mastered the Faculty of Paris, could not resist the refreshing air of the country, where I retired for six months, and when I returned to Paris, I was a new man. With what joy I saw again my beloved tools! With what ardour I re-

assumed my work! for I had to regain not only the lost time, but also the enormous expenses incurred by my long illness.

My modest fortune was for the moment sensibly diminished, but on this point I was case-hardened; for would not my future performances fill up all these losses, and ensure me a handsome fortune? Thus I discounted an uncertain future; but, after all, do not all inventors like to convert their schemes into ingots?

Perhaps, too, I unconsciously yielded to the influence of one of my friends, an extraordinary projector, whom mistakes and deceptions never hindered forming fresh schemes. Our manner of calculating the future had considerable affinity. But I must do him this justice: however high my estimate might be, he was far superior to me in that respect. Here is an instance to judge by.

One day this friend called upon me, and showing me an inkstand of his invention, which combined the double merit of being safe from upset, and of always keeping the ink at the same level, said,

"At last, my lad, I have hit it; this invention will make a revolution in the writing world, and allow me to walk about like a gentleman, with a hundred thousand francs a year—at the very lowest, understand me. But you can judge for yourself, if you follow my cal-

culations closely. You know, there are thirty-six millions of inhabitants in France?"

I nodded an affirmative.

"Starting on this basis, I do not think I err if I assume that at least one-half can write, eh? or, say we take one-third, or, to be still more sure, the round sum of ten millions. Now, I hope I shall not be charged with exaggeration, if, out of these ten millions, I take one-tenth, or a million, as the number of those looking after what may be useful to them."

And my friend stopped here and looked at me, as much as to say, "Am I not reasonable in my estimates?"

"We have, then, in France one million men capable of appreciating the benefits of my inkstand. Well, of this number how many will you allow who, during the first year, hear of my inkstand, and consequently will purchase it?"

"Well," I replied, "I confess to a difficulty in giving you an exact answer."

"Good Heavens! who spoke about exactness? I only want an approximation, and that must be the lowest possible, that there may be no mistake."

"Well," I went on, continuing my friend's decimal calculations, "take a tenth."

"Now, mind, *you* said a tenth, or, in other words, one hundred thousand. But," the inventor continued,

charmed at seeing me share his brilliant calculations, "do you know what the sale of these one hundred thousand inkstands will produce me in a year?"

"I can form no idea."

"I will then tell you. I have reserved myself one franc on each inkstand sold. This gives a profit, then——"

"Of one hundred thousand francs, of course."

"You see, there is no difficulty in making the calculation. You must bear in mind, too, that the other nine hundred thousand writers we left on one side will end by appreciating my inkstand: they will also buy it. Then what will the nine millions we omitted do? And notice, too, that I am only speaking of France, which is a mere dot on the globe. When foreign countries know its merits, when the English and their colonies order it——Oh, it would require a mathematician to reckon all this up!"

My friend wiped his brow, which had grown quite damp during the heat of his address, and he ended by repeating, "Remember, we established our estimate on the lowest basis."

Unfortunately, that was the place where my friend's calculation broke down. His inkstand, being much too dear, was not purchased, and the inventor ended by adding this gold mine to his many other deceptions.

I, too, I confess, based my calculations on the census,

or, at least, on the approximative number of visitors to the capital, and even at the lowest figure I arrived at a most satisfactory result. But I do not regret having given way to these fancies, for though they occasioned me various disappointments, they served to keep up some energy in my mind, and enabled me to wrestle against the numberless difficulties I encountered in making my automata. Besides, who has not, once in his life at least, indulged in the gilded calculations of my friend the inkstand inventor?

I have already repeatedly mentioned the automata I made, and it is high time to describe the nature of the articles intended to be used in my performances.

The first was a small pastrycook issuing from his shop-door at the word of command, and bringing, according to the spectator's request, patties and refreshments of every description. At the side of the shop assistant pastrycooks might be seen rolling paste and putting it in the oven.

Another specimen represented two clowns, Auriol and Debureau. The latter held out at arm's length a chair, on which his merry comrade performed acrobatic tricks, like his namesake at the Circus in the Champs Elysées. After these performances Auriol smoked a pipe, and ended by accompanying on the flageolet an air played by the orchestra.

The next was a mysterious orange-tree, on which

flowers and fruit burst into life at the request of the ladies. As the finale, a handkerchief I borrowed was conveyed into an orange purposely left on the tree. This opened and displayed the handkerchief, which two butterflies took by the corners and unfolded before the spectators.

Lastly, I made a dial of transparent glass, which marked the hours at the will of the spectators, and struck the time on a crystal bell.

At the time I was most deeply engaged in these labours, I made a very agreeable rencontre. While walking along the Boulevards, full of thought, according to my usual habit, I heard some one calling me. On turning round, an elegantly-dressed man pressed my hand.

"Antonio!" I exclaimed, as I embraced him, "how glad I am to see you! But why are you here—what are you doing—and Torrini?"

Antonio interrupted me. "I will tell you all about it. Come to my apartments, where we shall be more at ease. I only live a few doors off."

In fact, within two minutes we stopped in the Rue de Lancry before a very handsome house.

"Go up," Antonio said: "I live on the second floor."

A servant opened the door. "Is your mistress at home?" Antonio asked.

"No, sir; but I was to tell you she would be in soon."

After leading me into a pretty drawing-room, Antonio made me sit down by his side on a sofa.

"Now, my friend, let us talk, for we must have a great deal to tell each other."

"Yes, let us talk; for I confess that my curiosity is strongly excited. I fancy, at times, I am dreaming."

"I will bring you back to real life," Antonio continued, "by telling you what has happened to me since we parted. Let us begin with poor Torrini."

I made a movement of pained surprise.

"What do you say, Antonio? Can our friend——?"

"Yes, it is only too true. Death struck him at the moment we had every reason to hope a happier fate. On leaving you, Torrini intended to return as quickly as possible to Italy. The Count de Grisy was anxious to reassume his name and revisit the scenes of past successes, for he hoped there to become again the brilliant magician of yore. God decided otherwise. Just as we were about leaving Lyons, where he had been giving some successful performances, he was suddenly seized with typhus fever, which carried him off in a few days.

"I was his residuary legatee, and, after paying the last honours to a man to whom I had pledged my life, I began realising my small fortune. I sold the horses

and travelling-carriage, and kept the apparatus, as I intended to use it. I had no profession, so I thought I could not do better than take up one, for which the road was clear before me, and I hoped that my name, to which my brother-in-law had given a certain celebrity in France, would assist me. It was very bold in me to try and fill the place of such a master, but I thought my impudence would answer as well as talent.

"Hence I called myself Signor Torrini, and, after the fashion of my rivals, I added the title of 'first magician of France.' Each of us is always the first and the most skilful in the country where he happens to be, unless he think proper to call himself the first in the whole world. Conjuring is a profession in which, as you know, no one errs through excess of modesty, and the custom of producing illusions facilitates this issue of bad money, which the public, it is true, appreciates and sets its true value on.

"So it behaved to me, for, despite my pompous announcements, I frankly confess it did not recognise the celebrity I claimed. On the contrary, my performances were so little attended, that my receipts were hardly sufficient for my existence. Still I went from town to town, giving my performances, and nourishing myself more often on hope than on reality. But the moment arrived when this unsubstantial food no longer sufficed me, and I was forced to stop. I had exhausted my re-

sources: I had nothing left but my instruments. My clothes were reduced to the sheerest necessity, and threatened to desert me at any moment: thus hesitation was impossible. I decided on selling my instruments, and, provided with the small sum they produced me, I set out for Paris, the last refuge of those whose talent is neglected and position hopeless.

"In spite of my ill success, I had lost none of my stock of philosophy, and, though not very happy, I was full of hope in the future. Yes, my friend—yes, I had a presentiment at that time of the brilliant position fate reserved for me, and to which it led me, I may say, by the hand.

"Once arrived at Paris, I hired a modest room, and determined to live as savingly as possible, in order to make my money hold out. You see that, in spite of my confidence in the future, I took some precautions, so as not to run the risk of dying of hunger; but you will allow I acted wrong in not trusting entirely to my lucky star.

"I had hardly been in Paris a week, when I met an old comrade, a Florentine, who used to perform as second basso in my old theatre. He, too, had been maltreated by Fortune, and, having come to Paris, he found himself reduced to accept a situation in the chorus of the Opera. When I had revealed my position to him, he told me a tenor situation was vacant

in the chorus, and advised me to try and get it: I accepted the offer with pleasure, though, of course, as merely transitional, for I felt a pang at my descent. Still, prudence suggested I had better guard against want.

"I have often noticed," Antonio continued, "that those events which inspire us with the greatest doubt, turn out the most favourable, and mine was a case in point. As I had a good deal of spare time, I thought I would employ it in giving singing lessons. I, therefore, described myself as a singer at the Opera, while concealing the position I occupied there. Procuring my first pupil was as difficult as saving the first hundred pounds towards a fortune, and I had to wait a long time. At length I caught him; then others; and, gradually, I had enough pupils to enable me to leave the theatre.

"I must tell you this determination had another reason. I loved one of my lady pupils, and she returned my affection. Under such circumstances, it was not prudent to remain a chorus-singer, which might have impeded my views. You naturally expect some romantic adventure; but nothing could be more simple than the event which crowned our loves —it was marriage.

"Madame Torrini, whom you will see presently, was the daughter of a retired laceman. Her

father, a widower, with no other children, had no will but his daughter's, and he accepted my offers. He was the worthiest of men; but, unfortunately, we lost him two years ago. I retired from my professional duties on the fortune he left us, and I now live happily and calmly, in a position which realises my most brilliant dreams of old. This is another proof," my philosophic friend said, in conclusion, "that, however precarious may be the position in which a man finds himself, he ought never to despair of luck turning."

My story was not so long as Antonio's, for, with the exception of my marriage, there was no event worthy narrating. I told him, however, of my long illness, and the work that had brought it on, and I had scarce ended, when Madame Torrini entered the room. My friend's wife received me most kindly, saying:

"I have known you, sir, for a long time, as Antonio told me your history, which caused me to feel the greatest interest, and my husband and myself often regretted we could not hear of you. Now, however, M. Robert," she added, "that we have found you, consider yourself an old friend of the family, and come to see us often."

I profited by this kind invitation, and more than once went to seek consolation and encouragement from these worthy friends.

Antonio still took an interest in conjuring, although it was a mere distraction by which he amused his friends. Still, not a conjuror announced his performances but he went to see him. One morning he entered my workshop in great haste.

"Look here," he said, offering me a paper, "as you run after all the celebrated conjurors, here is one that will astonish you. Read."

I took the paper eagerly, and read the following puff:

"The famous Bosco, who can conjure away a house as easily as a nutmeg, is about to give his performances at Paris, in which some miraculous tricks will be executed."

"Well, what do you say to that?" Antonio asked me.

"A man must possess very great talent to undertake the responsibility of such praise. After all, I think the journalist is amusing himself at the expense of his readers, and that the famous Bosco only exists in his columns."

"You are quite wrong, my dear Robert: this conjuror is not an imaginary being, for not only have I read this puff in several papers, but I even saw Bosco last night at a café, giving some specimens of his skill, and announcing his first performance for next Tuesday."

"If it be so," I said to my friend, "I must ask you

to spend the evening with M. Bosco, and I will come and call for you."

"Done," said Antonio; "mind and call for me on Tuesday at half-past seven, as the performance commences at eight."

At the appointed time we proceeded to the Rue Chantereine, where the performance was announced. At the money-taker's box we found ourselves face to face with a stout gentleman, dressed in a coat adorned with frogs and trimmed with fur, making him look like a Russian prince on his travels. Antonio nudged me with his elbow, and said, in a whisper, "That's he!"

"Who's he?"

"Why, Bosco."

"All the worse," I said; "I am sorry for him."

"Explain yourself, for I do not understand the harm a Boyard's dress can do a man."

"My friend, I do not blame M. Bosco so much for his dress as for occupying his present place. I think an artiste cannot be too chary of his person off the stage; there is so much difference between the man whom an entire audience listens to and applauds, and the director who comes openly to watch his paltry interests, that the latter must injure the former."

During this conversation, my friend and myself had

entered the room and taken our seats. According to the idea I had formed of a magician's laboratory, I expected to find myself before a curtain whose large folds, when withdrawn, would display before my dazzled eyes a brilliant stage ornamented with apparatus worthy of the celebrity announced; but my illusions on this subject soon faded away.

A curtain had been considered superfluous, and the stage was open. Before me was a long three-storied sideboard, entirely covered with black serge. This lugubrious buffet was adorned with a number of wax candles, among which glistened the apparatus. At the topmost point of this strange *étagère* was a death's-head, much surprised, I have no doubt, at finding itself at such a festival, and it quite produced the effect of a funeral service.

In front of the stage, and near the spectators, was a table covered by a brown cloth, reaching to the ground, on which five brass cups were symmetrically arranged. Finally, above this table hung a copper ball, which strangely excited my curiosity.*

For the life of me I could not imagine what this was for, so I determined to wait till Bosco came to explain it. Antonio had entered into conversation

* Since this period Bosco has changed his stage decorations: his cloths have altered their colours, his candles are shorter, but the death's-head, the ball, the costume, and the tricks, have ever remained the same.

with his neighbour, who spoke in the most enthusiastic manner of the performance we were about to witness. The silvery sound of a small bell put an end to my reverie and to my friend's conversation, and Bosco appeared on the stage.

The artiste had changed his costume: he had substituted for the Russian great-coat a little black velvet jacket, fastened round the waist by a leathern belt of the same colour. His sleeves were excessively short, and displayed a handsome arm. He wore loose black trousers, ornamented at the bottom with a ruche of lace, and a large white collar round his neck. This strange attire bore considerable resemblance to the classical costume of the Scapins in our plays.

After making a majestic bow to his audience, the celebrated conjuror walked silently and with measured steps up to the famous copper ball. After convincing himself it was solidly hung, he took up his wand, which he wiped with a white handkerchief, as if to remove any foreign influence; then, with imperturbable gravity, he struck the ball thrice with it, pronouncing, amid the most solemn silence, this imperious summons: *Spiriti miei infernali, obedite.*

I, like a simpleton, scarce breathed in my expectation of some miraculous result, but it was only an innocent pleasantry, a simple introduction to the performance with the cups. I was, I confess, rather dis-

appointed, for, in my opinion, this performance was only suited for the public streets, and I did not expect any one would venture it on a Paris stage in 1838. I was justified in this view, as two persons, Miette and Lesprit, might be daily seen going through this performance in the streets. Still, I must say that Bosco displayed great skill, and was heartily applauded by the public.

"Well," Antonio's neighbour said, victoriously, "was I not right?—is he not remarkably clever? But you'll see, that's nothing as yet."

Either Antonio was in a bad temper, or the performance did not please him, for he could not "plant" the admiration he had been quite prepared to bestow. In fact, he became most impatient when Bosco commenced the "pigeon trick." Still, it must be allowed that the *mise en scène* and the execution were of a nature to irritate nerves even less sensitive than my friend's.

A servant placed on small tables on either side the stage two small blocks of black wood, on each of which a death's-head was painted. They were the blocks for the culprits. Bosco then came forward, holding a knife in one hand and a black pigeon in the other.

"Here is a pizon" (I forgot to state that Bosco spoke with a strong Italian accent) "zat has behaved badly. I am going to cut off his head; zall it be,

ladies, wiz blood or wizout?" (This was one of his strong points.)

Some people laughed, but the ladies hesitated to reply to this strange question.

"Without blood," a spectator said. Bosco then placed the pigeon's head on the block and cut it off, being careful to press the neck, and prevent the effusion of blood.

"You zee, ladies," the operator said, "zat ze pizon does not bleed, as you ordered."

"With blood," suppose another spectator said. Then Bosco loosened the artery, and let the blood run on a plate, which he handed round for inspection. The head, after being cut off, was placed upright on one of the blocks; and Bosco, taking advantage of a convulsive movement, which caused the beak to open, made this barbarous jest: "Come, mossiou, bow to zis amiable company—now once more. Ah, ah, zat is right."

The public listened, but no longer laughed.

The same operation was performed on a white pigeon without the slightest variation, after which Bosco placed the bodies in two false-bottomed boxes, being careful to put the black head with the white pigeon, and the white head with the black one. Then he repeated his conjurations over the boxes, and when he opened them, a black pigeon came out with a white head, and a white one with a black head. Each of the

culprits, according to Bosco, had been restored to life, and assumed its comrade's head.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Antonio's neighbour asked him, as he clapped vociferously.

"To tell you the truth," my friend replied, "I must say the trick is not very wonderful. Besides, I should like it better were it performed with less cruelty."

"Ah, you have delicate nerves, I see," the neighbour said; "perhaps you experience similar sensations when you see a fowl killed and put on the spit?"

"Allow me, sir, before answering you," my friend replied, sharply, to ask if I have come here to see a kitchen performance?"

The discussion was growing warm, and was rather savage in its tone, when a third party terminated the dispute by the following jest:

"Hang it, sir," he said to Antonio, "if you do not like cruelty, at any rate do not disgust other people with it."

Bosco now returned on the stage with a canary in his hand.

"Zentlemen," he said, "this is Piarot: he is very polite, and zall zalute you. Come, Piarot, do your duty." And he pinched the bird's claws with such force that the unfortunate tried to escape from this cruel clutch. Overcome by pain, it bent down over the juggler's hand, uttering cries of distress.

"Zat is good; I am zatisfied wiz you. You see,

ladies, he not only zalutes you, but he says 'Good night.' Continue, Piarot, you zall be rewarded."

The same torture made the bird bow twice more, and to *reward* it its master placed it in the hands of a lady, begging her to keep it. But during the passage the bird had ended its life, and reached the lady's hand dead. Bosco had strangled it.

"Oh, good Heavens, madam!" the conjuror exclaimed, "I believe you have killed my Piarot—you zall have squeezed him too moch. Piarot—Piarot!" he added, tossing the bird in the air, "Piarot, answer to me. Ah, madam, he is dezidedly dead. What zall my wife say when she sees Bosco arrive wizout his Piarot: quite zurely I zall be beaten by Madame Bosco." (I must observe, here, that all I describe is literally true.)

The bird was interred in a large box, whence, after fresh conjurations, a living bird came out. This new victim was fated to suffer shorter agony. It was thrust alive into the barrel of a large pistol, and Bosco, holding a sword in his hand, begged a spectator to fire at the point of the weapon he held out to him. The pistol was fired, and a third victim was seen spitted on the point of the sword.

Antonio rose. "Let us go," he said, "for I am turning sick."

I have seen Bosco several times since then, and each

time I studied him carefully, not only to try and explain the cause of the great fashion he enjoyed, but also to be able to compare the various opinions expressed about this celebrated man. Here are some deductions drawn from my observations.

Bosco's performances generally please a large number, for the public suppose that, through some inexplicable address, the bird-murders are simply feigned, and, tranquil on this point, they indulge in all the pleasure caused by the talent of the conjuror and the originality of his accent.

Bosco has a quaint and full-sounding name, adapted to become popular, and no one knows better than he how to take advantage of it. Neglecting no opportunity for notoriety, he performs at any hour of the day, whatever may be the quality and number of the spectators. In a coach, at a table d'hôte, in cafés or shops, he never fails to give some specimen of his skill, by juggling a coin, a ring, and so on.

The witnesses of these little improvised performances consider themselves bound to return Bosco's politeness, by attending his public performance. They have formed the acquaintance of the celebrated conjuror, and are obliged to sustain the reputation of their new friend. Hence, they urge all their acquaintances to go also, puff off the performance, and thus the room is always full.

It must also be mentioned that numerous accomplices help Bosco's popularity materially. Each of them, it is known, is instructed to hand the magician a handkerchief, shawl, watch, &c., which he has in double. This allows him to pass them with an appearance of magic or skill, into a cabbage, a loaf, a box, or any other object. These accomplices, while aiding in the conjuror's experiments, have a great interest in securing their success: for their self-love finds its profit in the success of the mystification. Besides, they have no objection to accept some of the applause as their due: hence, the magician has as many admirers as accomplices, and the influence a dozen intelligent prompters can exert in a room is well known.

Such were the influences which, joined to Bosco's talent, gained him a great renown for many years.

CHAPTER XI.

A Reverse of Fortune—Cookery and Clockwork—The Artist's Home—Invention of an Automaton—Voluntary Exile—A modest Villa—The Inconveniences of a Speciality—Two August Visitors—The Throat of a mechanical Nightingale—The Tiou and the Rrrrrrrrouit—Seven Thousand Francs earned by making Filings.

In the mean while I worked indefatigably at my automata, hoping that when these were completed, I should be able to establish myself permanently. But, in spite of my activity, I advanced very slowly towards the realisation of my long-deferred hopes.

Only an inventor can know the value of a day's work on the gloomy road to success in combining automata. Numberless trials and deceptions of every nature foil at any moment the best-conceived plans, and seem to realise the pleasant story about reaching the end of a journey by making two steps forward and three backward.

I performed this wearisome progress during six months, and, at the end of that time, though I had several specimens far advanced, it was still impossible for me to fix the period when they would be quite

finished. In order not to defer my appearance before the public, I therefore resolved to begin with my conjuring tricks and such automata as were ready. I had arranged with an architect, who was to help me in finding a suitable site for a theatre, but I had scarce taken my first steps, when an unforeseen catastrophe ruined both my father-in-law and myself.

This reverse of fortune threw me into a state of abject despondency, for I saw, to my terror, the realisation of my plans indefinitely postponed. I could no longer think of inventing machines, but must work, day by day, to support my large family. I had four children, all very young, and this was a heavy burden on a man who had never yet thought of his own interests.

The vulgar truth, "Time dissipates the severest griefs," is not the less true from being so often repeated; and it was the case with me. I was at first as wretched as man could well be; then my despair gradually died away, and made room for sorrow and resignation. At last, as it is not in my nature to keep up a melancholy character long, I ended by accepting the situation. Then the future, which had appeared so gloomy, assumed a different face, and, by a gradual process of reasoning, I began to indulge in reflections whose consoling philosophy restored my courage.

"Why should I despair?" I said to myself. "At my age, time itself is a fortune, and I have a considerable reserve fund of that. Besides, who knows whether Providence, by sending me this trial, has not wished to delay an undertaking that was not yet quite assured of success?"

In fact, what had I to offer the public that would overcome the indifference a new performer always inspires?—improved conjuring tricks? Those, I thought, would not prevent me failing, for I was unaware at that period that, in order to please the public, an idea must be, if not novel, at least completely transformed, so that it cannot be recognised. Only in that way can an artiste escape a remark that always fills him with dread—"I have seen that before." My automata and mechanical curiosities would not have betrayed the hopes I built upon them, but I had too few, and the specimens I had in hand still required years of study and labour.

These wise reflections restored my courage, and, resigned to my new situation, I resolved to effect an utter reform in my budget. I had nothing more to look for than what I earned with my own hands, so I hired a modest lodging, at three hundred francs a year, in the Rue du Temple. It consisted of a room, a cabinet, and a stove in a cupboard, to which my proprietor gave the name of kitchen. I converted the

largest room into our common sleeping apartment, the cabinet served as my workshop, while the stove kitchen was used to prepare our modest meals.

My wife, though in delicate health, undertook the household department. Fortunately, this was not very laborious, as our meals were most modest; and as our rooms were limited in number, there was not much moving about required. The proximity of our mutual laboratories had also this double advantage, that, whenever my housekeeper was absent, I could watch the pot-au-feu or stir a ragoût without leaving my levers, wheels, and cogs.

These vulgar occupations for an artiste will make many a reader smile, but when a man cannot afford to keep a servant, and the quality of the dinner, consisting of a single dish, depends on the care devoted to it, it is better to pocket one's dignity and attend to the culinary department, at any rate, without feeling false shame. However, it appears that I performed my confidential mission admirably, for my exactitude gained me abundant praise. Still, I must confess that I had very slight talent for cooking, and this boasted exactitude was produced by my fear of incurring the reproaches of my head cook.

This humble existence was less painful to me than I had imagined. I had always been moderate, and the privation of succulent dishes affected me very little.

My wife, surrounded by her children, to whom she devoted her utmost care, seemed equally happy, while hoping for better times to come.

I had resumed my first trade, that of repairing watches and clocks. Still, this was only to secure our hand-to-mouth existence, for all the while I was repairing I was meditating a piece of clockwork, the success of which restored some ease to our household. It was an alarum, which was thus arranged:

You placed it by your side when you went to bed, and, at the hour desired, a peal aroused the sleeper, while, at the same time, a ready lighted candle came out from a small box. I was the prouder of this invention and its success, as it was the first of my ideas which produced me any profit.

This "alarum light," as I christened it, was so popular that, in order to satisfy the great demand for it, I was obliged to add a workshop to my rooms and hire several workmen. Encouraged by such a favourable result, I turned my attention afresh to inventions, and gave a free scope to my imagination. I succeeded in making several more toys, among which was one which my readers will probably remember to have seen in the shop-windows. It was a glass dial, mounted on a column of the same material. This "mysterious clock" (as I called it), although entirely transparent, indicated the hour with the greatest exactness, and

struck, without any apparent mechanism to make it move. I also constructed several automata, such as a conjuror playing with cups, a dancer on the tight-rope, singing birds, &c.

It may strike the reader that, with so many strings to my bow, and such amusing toys to make, my situation would be considerably improved, but it was not so. Each day, on the contrary, produced fresh trouble in my trade as well as in my household, and I even saw a financial crisis approaching which I found it impossible to prevent.

The cause of this result was very simple. While engaged with the mechanical toys I have just mentioned, I still worked at my theatrical automata, for which my passion had been again aroused by my present labours. Like the gambler, who throws his last farthing on the board, I invested all my earnings in my theatrical preparations, hoping these would soon repay me for my sacrifices with a hundred per cent. profit.

But it was fated that I should no sooner see the realisation of my projects close at hand, than an unforeseen event should remove it again from my grasp. I had a sum of two thousand francs to pay at the end of the month; I had not a penny to meet it, and I had only three days left before the bill I had accepted became due.

Never did an embarrassment arrive more inopportunely! I had just formed the plan of an automaton in which I placed the greatest hopes. It was a "writing and drawing automaton," answering in writing or emblematic designs questions proposed by the spectators, and I intended to employ this figure between the performances in my future theatre.

Once more was I obliged to check the flight of my imagination to absorb myself in the vulgar and difficult problem of meeting a bill when you have no money. I might, it is true, have saved myself all trouble by applying to my friends, but prudence and delicacy rendered it my duty to pay it from my own resources. Providence, doubtlessly, recognised the merit of my resolution, for she sent me a saving idea.

I had sold several mechanical toys to M. G——, a rich curiosity dealer, who had always treated me with marked kindness. I went to him, and gave him an exact description of my new automaton, and necessity must have rendered me eloquent, for M. G—— was so satisfied that he bought my automaton on the spot, which I bound myself to deliver to him within eighteen months. The price was arranged at five thousand francs, half of which M. G—— agreed to pay me in advance, reserving to himself the right, if I failed in my promise, of recouping himself by purchasing several of my automatic toys.

Imagine my joy when I returned home, holding in my hands the money to meet the bill! But the prospect of devoting myself for a long time to the manufacture of an article satisfying my mechanical taste, rendered me even happier.

Still, the princely way in which M. G—— had concluded the bargain, produced some serious thoughts as to the promise I had made him. I now saw a thousand obstacles to prevent me keeping my word. I calculated that, even if I devoted every moment to my work, I should lose much time by causes I could not foresee or hinder. There were, first, friends, customers, and bores; then a family dinner, an evening party, that could not be declined, a visit that must be paid, and so on. These claims on politeness, which I must respect, would inevitably cause me to break my word: in vain I racked my brain in devising some scheme to gain time, or at least not lose it; still, I could only succeed at the expense of my good temper. I therefore formed a resolution which my relations and friends declared to be madness, but from which they could not turn me, and that was to exile myself voluntarily until my task was completed.

Paris not appearing to me a secure place against annoyance, I chose the suburbs as my retreat, and one fine day, despite the prayers and supplications of my whole family, after entrusting my business to one of

my workmen, whose talent and probity I was convinced of, I proceeded to Belleville, and installed myself in a little room in the Rue des Bois, which I hired for twelve months, at a hundred francs. The only furniture was a bed, a chest of drawers, a table, and a few chairs.

This act of madness, as my friends called it, or this heroic determination, as I called it, saved me from imminent ruin, and was my first step on the ladder of success. From this moment an obstinate will was aroused in me which enabled me to confront many obstacles and difficulties.

I am bound to confess that the first days of my retirement were painful, and I bitterly deplored the harsh necessity that thus isolated me from all I loved. The society of my wife and children had grown a necessity to me; a kiss from these dear beings restored my courage in hours of despondency, and now I was deprived of it. Surely I must have been supported by an enormous strength of will not to turn back at the prospect of this frightful vacuum.

Many times I furtively wiped away a tear, but then I closed my eyes, and straightway my automaton and the various combinations that were to animate it appeared before me like a consoling vision; I passed in review all the wheels I had created; I smiled upon them like so many children of my own; and when I emerged

from this restorative dream I set to work again, filled with a courageous resignation.

It had been arranged that my wife and children should spend every Thursday evening with me, and I always dined at home on Sunday. These few hours devoted to my family were the only amusements I allowed myself.

At my wife's request, the portress of the house had agreed to prepare my meals: this excellent creature, an old *cordon bleu*, had left service to marry a mason of the name of Monsieur Auguste. This gentleman, judging by my modest existence in the house, thought me a poor devil who found some difficulty in keeping himself: hence, he assumed an air of generous protection, or kindly pity towards me. As he was a worthy man at the bottom, I pardoned his ways, and only laughed at them.

My new cook had received special instructions to treat me famously, but, not wishing to increase my household expenses, I, on my side, made stipulations which were kept with the greatest secrecy. I arranged my meals after the following fashion: Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays I lived on an enormous dish, to which my chef gave the generic name of *fricot*, but that made no difference to me. On Friday and Saturday, for the sake of my health, I lived low; haricot beans, either white or red, satisfied my hunger,

and with them a composite soup, often reminding me of the gastronomic tastes of an Auvergnat, and I dined as well, perhaps better, than Brillat-Savarin himself.

This mode of life offered me two advantages: I spent little, and indigestion never troubled the clearness of my ideas. I required this, however, for it must not be supposed that mechanical difficulties were the only ones I had to contend against in making my automaton. My readers may judge, from the following incident, which also proves the truth of the proverb, "Willing is doing."

At the commencement of my labour I had ordered from a wood-carver the body, head, legs, and arms of my writer, and had applied to an artist, particularly recommended to me as most skilful, and I had tried to make him understand the importance I attached to my automaton having an intelligent face. My Phidias had replied that I might trust to him.

A month after my sculptor made his appearance: he carefully removed the wrapper, and showed me arms and legs splendidly carved, and ended by handing me the head, with an air that seemed to signify, "What do you think of that?"

After what I had already seen I was prepared to admire a masterpiece, but imagine my stupor on observing that the head belonged to a saint! Quite

astounded at this, I looked at my friend as if seeking an explanation, but he did not seem to understand me, and continued to point out all the beauties of his work. I had no good reason to refuse it, for; after its fashion, it was a very fine head, so I accepted it, though it could be of no use to me. At any rate, I wished to know the motive that induced my sculptor to select such a type, and, by dint of cross-examination, I learned that his special trade was carving saints, and he could not emerge from his usual "groove."

After this check, I applied to another artist, being careful to inquire of him previously whether he had been in the habit of carving heads of saints. In spite of my precautions, I only got from this artist a head bearing a strong family likeness to those Nuremberg dolls made to act as lay figures in studios.

I had not the courage to make a third trial; yet, my writer required a head, and I regarded my chefs-d'œuvre in turn. Neither could by possibility suit me. A head with not the slightest expression spoiled my automaton, while a holy Jerome on the body of a writer dressed in the Louis XV. style would be a terrible anachronism.

"And yet the face I want is engraved here," I said, striking my forehead. "What a pity I cannot carve it—suppose I were to try!"

It has always been my character to set about a

scheme as soon as I had formed it, whatever the difficulties might be. Hence I took a piece of modelling wax, made it into a ball, in which I formed three holes, representing mouth and eyes, then sticking on a patch for a nose, I stopped to admire my handiwork.

Have you ever noticed a toy belonging to earliest youth, representing two blacksmiths at work on an anvil, which they are made to strike in turn by pulling two parallel rods? Well, those mechanical combinations, sold at one penny, I believe, are perfect marvels of art in comparison with my first essay in modelling.

Dissatisfied, disgusted, and almost angry, I threw my clumsy attempt aside, and thought of some other plan to escape my difficulty. But I have already said I am obstinate and persevering in all I undertake, and the greater the difficulty seems, the more I feel myself pledged to surmount it. The night passed in dreams which showed me my task satisfactorily accomplished, and the next morning I took heart, and went at it again. In fact, by passing a chisel over my ball—by taking away from one side and adding to the other—I succeeded in making eyes, mouth, and nose, which, if not regular, had at least the appearance of a human form.

The following days were spent in fresh studies and improvements, and each time I noticed some progress

in my work. Still, a moment arrived when I was terribly embarrassed. The face was regular, but that was not enough. I must give it some sort of character; but, as I had no model, the task seemed beyond my strength.

The idea struck me of looking in the glass, and judging from my own face what features produce expression. Sitting down, then, as if writing, I studied my full face and profile, and tried to imitate what I saw. I was engaged at this task a long while, incessantly touching and retouching, until one fine day I found my work finished, and I stopped to look at it more attentively. Judge of my surprise on finding that I had unconsciously produced an exact likeness of myself. Far from being vexed at this unexpected result, I was pleased, for it was quite natural this child of my imagination should have my features. I was not sorry to place this family seal on a work to which I attached such importance.

I had been now living for more than a year at Belleville, and I saw with extreme pleasure the end of my task and of my exile drawing near. After many doubts as to the success of my enterprise, the solemn moment arrived when I should make the first trial of my writer. I had spent the whole day in giving the last touches to the automaton, which sat before me as if awaiting my orders, and prepared to answer

the questions I asked it. I had only to press the spring in order to enjoy the long awaited result. My heart beat violently, and though I was alone, I trembled with emotion at the mere thought of this imposing trial.

I had just laid the first sheet of paper before my writer, and asked him this question:

"Who is the author of your being?"

I pressed the spring, and the clockwork began acting. I dared hardly breathe through fear of disturbing the operations. The automaton bowed to me, and I could not refrain from smiling on it as on my own son. But when I saw the eyes fix an attentive glance on the paper—when the arm, a few seconds before numb and lifeless, began to move and trace my signature in a firm handwriting—the tears started to my eyes, and I fervently thanked Heaven for granting me such success. And it was not alone the satisfaction I experienced as inventor, but the certainty I had of being able to restore some degree of comfort to my family, that caused my deep feeling of gratitude.

After making my Sosia repeat my signature a thousand times, I gave it this next question: "What o'clock is it?"

The automaton, acting in obedience to a clock, wrote: "It is two in the morning."

This was a very timely warning. I profited by it,

and went straight to bed. Against my expectations, I enjoyed a sleep I had not known for a long time.

There may be among those who read my book some who have also created some successful work. They will know that next to the happiness of enjoying one's own invention, nothing is so flattering as to offer it to the notice of a third party. Molière and J. J. Rousseau consulted their servants, and, I must confess, it afforded me great pleasure the next morning to invite my portress and her husband to be present at the first performance of my writer.

As it was Sunday, and M. Auguste had no work to do, I found him at breakfast. He held a modest sardine with his thumb on a piece of bread, while in the other hand he had a knife, the handle of which was fastened to his waist by a lanyard. My invitation was graciously accepted, and they came to my room to witness the aristocratic performance of a nobleman of the age of Louis XV. The mason's wife chose this question: "What is the emblem of fidelity?" The automaton replied by drawing a pretty little greyhound lying on a cushion. Madame Auguste, quite delighted, begged me to make her a present of the drawing, while her husband, having by this time finished his breakfast, begged to see the work, for, as he said,

"I understand something about that sort of thing,

for I have always to grease the vane on the church steeple, and have even taken it down twice. Ah! if I were to direct my attention to mechanics, I have no doubt I should be very successful."

Although, of course, he understood nothing of what he saw, the worthy mason carefully examined the mechanical arrangements; then, as if yielding to an impulsive frankness, he said, in a kindly protecting tone,

"If I was not afraid of vexing you, I would make an observation."

"Pray do so, Monsieur Auguste, and be sure I shall treat it as it deserves."

"Well, in your place, I would have made the mechanism much more simple; for then those who do not understand that sort of thing, would be able to do so more easily."

With some difficulty I maintained sufficient gravity to reply:

"Your observation is very just, Monsieur Auguste; I had not thought of that: but be assured I shall now profit by your suggestions, and speedily remove half the machinery; there will be quite sufficient left."

"Oh, certainly," the mason said, believing in the sincerity of my remarks, "there will be quite enough left then."

At this moment the garden-bell rang, and M. Au-

guste, ever attentive to his duties, ran to answer it, and as his wife also took her departure, I was enabled to laugh at my ease.

It is curious that an automaton which was visited by all Paris and gained me such reputation—that the designer, which interested Louis Philippe and his family so greatly, should at the outset only receive the stupid criticism of a porter. Well, a man is no more a prophet in his own house than in his own country.

It was more extraordinary, though, that I had eventually to make an alteration in the automaton for the following reasons: the public (I do not mean the educated portion) generally understand nothing of the mechanical effects by which an automaton is moved; but they are pleased to see them, and often only value them by the multiplicity of their parts. I had taken every care to render the mechanism of my writer as perfect as possible, and had set great store on making the clockwork noiseless. In doing this, I wished to imitate nature, whose complicated instruments act almost imperceptibly.

Can it be credited that this very perfection, which I had worked so hard to attain, was unfavourable to my automaton? On its first exhibition, I frequently heard persons who only saw the outside, say:

"That writer is first-rate; but the mechanism is probably very simple. It often requires such a trifle to produce great results."

The idea then struck me of rendering the clockwork a little less perfect, so that a whizzing sound should be heard, something like cotton spinning. Then the worthy public formed a very different estimate of my work, and the admiration increased in a ratio to the intensity of the noise. Such exclamations as these were continually heard: "How ingenious! What complicated machinery! What talent such combinations must require!"

In order to obtain this result, I had rendered my automaton less perfect; and I was wrong. In this I followed the example of certain actors who overdo their parts in order to produce a greater effect. They raise a laugh, but they infringe the rules of art, and are rarely ranked among first-rate artists. Eventually, I got over my susceptibility, and my machine was restored to its first condition.

My writer thus finished, I could have ended my voluntary imprisonment if I pleased; but I wished to finish another automaton, for which a residence in the country would be requisite. Although this second automaton was very complicated, it did not so fully occupy my time as the first. It was a nightingale,

which a rich merchant of St. Petersburg had ordered, and I had agreed to produce a perfect imitation of the song and actions of this delightful wood minstrel.

This undertaking offered some serious difficulties; for though I had already made several birds, their singing was quite arbitrary, and I had only consulted my own taste in arranging it. The imitation of the nightingale's pipe was much more delicate, for I had to copy notes and sounds which were almost inimitable.

Fortunately, we were in the season when this skilful songster utters his delicious accents; hence, I could employ him as my teacher. I went constantly to the wood of Romainville, the skirt of which almost joined the street in which I lived, and, laying myself on a soft bed of moss in the densest foliage, I challenged my master to give me lessons. (The nightingale sings both by night and day, and the slightest whistle, in tune or not, makes him strike up directly.)

I wanted to imprint on my memory the musical phrases with which the bird composes its melodies. The following are the most striking among them: *tiou-tiou-tiou*, *ut-ut-ut-ut-ut*, *tchitchou*, *tchitchou*, *tchit-tchit*, *rrrrrrrrrrrouit*, &c. I had to analyse these strange sounds, these numberless chirps, these impossible rrrrrouits, and recompose them by a musical process. Now, here was the difficulty. I only knew so much

of music as a natural taste had taught me, and my knowledge of harmony was hence a very feeble resource. I must add that, in order to imitate this flexibility of throat, and reproduce these harmonious modulations, I had a small copper tube, about the size and length of a quill, in which a steel piston moving very freely, produced the different sounds I required; this tube represented in some respects the nightingale's throat.

This instrument would have to work mechanically: clockwork set in motion the bellows, opened or closed a valve which produced the twittering, the modulation, and the sliding notes, while it guided the piston according to the different degrees of speed and depth I wanted to reach.

I had also to impart motion to the bird: it must move its beak in accordance with the sounds it produced, flap its wings, leap from branch to branch, &c. But this part of my task troubled me much less than the other, as it was purely mechanical.

I will not attempt to describe to the reader all the trials and investigations I had to make; suffice it to say that, after repeated experiments, I created a system, half musical, half mechanical, which only required to be improved by fresh studies. Provided with this instrument, I hurried off to the wood of Romainville, where I seated myself under an oak,

near which I had often heard a nightingale sing, which I thought was the "star" among the virtuosi. I wound up the clockwork, and it began playing in the midst of profound silence; but the last notes had scarce died away ere a concert commenced from various parts of the wood, which I was almost inclined to regard as a general protest against my clumsy imitation.

This collective lesson did not suit my purpose, for I wished to compare and study, and could positively distinguish nothing. Fortunately for me, all the musicians ceased, as if by word of command, and one of them began a solo: it was doubtlessly the *premier sujet*, the Duprez of the company—possibly the nightingale I have just mentioned. This tenor indulged me with a succession of dulcet sounds and accents, which I followed with all the attention of an industrious pupil.

Thus I passed a portion of the night; my professor was indefatigable, and, for my part, I was not weary of listening. At length we were obliged to part, for, in spite of the pleasure I felt, I began to grow chilly and sleepy. However, my lesson had done me so much good, that the next morning I began making important corrections in my mechanism. After five or six more visits to the wood, I attained the required result—the nightingale's song was perfectly imitated.

After eighteen months' stay at Belleville, I at length returned home to enjoy the company of my wife and children; in my absence my business had prospered, and I, by the manufacture of my two automata, had gained the enormous sum of seven thousand francs.

Seven thousand francs by making filings, as my father used to say. Unfortunately, that excellent man could not enjoy the beginning of my success—I had lost him a short time before the reverse of my fortune. With his love for mechanical inventions, how proud he would have been of my successes!

Having thus regained a certain degree of comfort, I was now able to enjoy some amusement, and visit my friends, among them Antonio, who could not blame me for deserting him so long. In our long conversations my friend never ceased to encourage me to realise the projects he had suggested—I mean my theatrical schemes, of which he predicted the certain success.

While not neglecting my work, I had recommenced my conjuring exercises, and began to make the acquaintance of several conjurors. I also wished to see those ingenious personages who, not having a theatre to display their talents in, visit the cafés. Such men as these are obliged to employ an extraordinary degree of skill, for they have to deal with people who are set upon detecting them. I met several interesting spe-

cimens from whom I learned something; but a slight adventure soon told me I must be on my guard in the choice of my acquaintances.

A conjuror, whom I had formerly met at Roujol's, and to whom I had rendered a service, introduced me one day to a person of the name of D——. He was a young man of prepossessing appearance and very elegantly dressed, while his manners evidenced the thorough gentleman.

"My friend tells me, sir," he said, after the usual salutations, "that you are in search of a person possessing a certain degree of address. Although I have no wish to compliment myself, I may be able to show many things you do not know."

"I accept your offer willingly," I replied, "but I must tell you beforehand I am not a novice."

This introduction took place in my study, and we sat down to a table on which refreshments were served. This was a trap by which I intended to make my visitor more communicative. I then took up a pack of cards, and showed him my dexterity in *sauter la coupe* and various other tricks.

I was watching D—— to observe the impression I produced on him, and after a few moments' careful following of my hands, he gave his comrade a gentle wink, of which I did not understand the meaning. I

stopped for a moment, and not wishing to ask a direct explanation, I opened a bottle of Bordeaux, and filled his glass several times. This scheme was successful; the wine loosened his tongue, and he told me something that surprised me.

"I have a remark to make, M. Robert-Houdin," he said, emptying his glass, and holding it out to be filled again; "I thought I had come here to deal with what we call a 'pigeon;' I perceive it is quite otherwise, and as I do not wish to expose the tricks by which I earn my livelihood, I will content myself with the pleasure of having formed your acquaintance."

The technical terms seemed to me a startling contrast to my visitor's elegant manners, still, as I did not wish to give in yet, I said, in a tone of disappointment,

"I hope, sir, you will recal your decision, and not leave me till you have shown me how you handle the cards. You can do this without prejudice, I think?"

To my great satisfaction he at length consented.

"Very well," he said, taking up a pack of cards; "but you will see our modes of 'working' do not agree."

It would be difficult for me to give a name to what he performed in my presence. It was not, properly

speaking, sleight of hand; they were tricks and processes applied to cards, and were so unexpected, that they must deceive everybody. This manipulation was only an exhibition, however, of certain principles I learnt at a later date.

Like singers who begin by being urged, and who, when they have once started, cannot leave off, D——, animated both by the sincere praise I offered him and the great number of glasses of Bordeaux he had swallowed, said to me with that frankness common to drinkers, "And now, sir, I will give you another hint. I am not a professor of sleight of hand, but only perform a few tricks I show to amateurs. These lessons, you can understand, would not suffice for my livelihood, and I will tell you, then," he added, emptying his glass again, and holding it out to be filled, as if he wished me to pay for his confidence, "I visit in the evening houses where I have managed to gain an introduction, and profit by some of the principles I have just shown you."

"I suppose you give a performance?" D—— smiled slightly, and repeated the wink he had once before given his comrade.

"Performances!" he replied. "Never! or, rather, I give them after my own fashion; I will explain that to you presently, but I will first amuse you by telling

you how I manage to get a handsome prize for the lessons I give my amateurs; after that I will return to my *performances*.

"You can suppose, for reasons easy to understand, that I only give lessons to young men whose pockets I presume are well lined. On beginning my explanations I tell my pupil that I leave the price to him, and during the lesson I perform an interlude which must heighten his generosity.

"Drawing near my pigeon—pray pardon the word——"

"I have already done so."

"Ah, very good; I beg your pardon. I say, taking one of his buttons in my hand, 'Here is a mould piercing the cloth, and you might lose it.'

"At the same time I throw a Louis on the table; then I examine his buttons, one after the other, and pretend to draw a gold piece from each. As I only perform this trick as a harmless pleasantry, I pick up my gold with the greatest indifference. I even push my indifference so far as to leave one or two by mistake on the table, but only for a short time, of course.

"I continue my lesson, and, as I expected, my pupil pays but slight attention to it, being fully engaged with the reflections I have so skilfully suggested. Can he offer five francs to a man who appears to have his

pocket full of gold? Of course not; the least he can do is to add one more piece to those I had displayed, and that always happens.

"Like a modern Bias, then, I carry all my fortune about me; I am sometimes tolerably rich, and then my pockets are well lined. Often enough, too, I am reduced to a dozen of these 'yellow boys,' but them I never touch, as they are the instruments by which I procure others. Many times I have gone without my dinner, though having this small fortune in my pocket, because I laid it down as a rule not to break into it."

"The performances you give in society," I said to my narrator, in order to bring him back to that point, "are of course more lucrative?"

"They are so, but prudence prevents me giving them so often as I should like."

"I do not understand you."

"I will explain my meaning. When I am in society, I am a young man of good family, and, like all young men, play. The only difference is, I have my own way of playing, which is not that of all the world, but it seems it is not bad, because it often renders chances favourable. You shall judge."

Here my narrator stopped to refresh himself, then, as if doing the most legal or harmless thing in the

world, he showed me several tricks, or rather acts of swindling, which he executed with so much grace, skill, and simplicity, that it would be impossible to detect him.

In order to understand the effect these culpable confessions produced upon me, my readers ought to know what it is to love a science of which you seek to solve the mysteries. Far from feeling repugnance or even disgust at this man with whom justice would have one day an account to settle, I admired, I was stunned! The finesse and perfection of his tricks made me forget their blameworthy application.

At length my Greek left me, and so soon as he was gone the remembrance of his confessions sent the blood to my cheeks. I was as ashamed of myself as if I had been his accomplice. I even reproached myself severely for the admiration I could not restrain, and the compliments it extorted from me. In some measure to compound with my conscience, I ordered my door to be closed against this man; but it was an unnecessary precaution—I never heard of him again.

Strangely enough, in consequence of my meeting with D——, and the revelations he had made me, I was enabled, at a later period, to render a service to society by unmasking a piece of swindling which the most skilful experts could not detect.

In 1849, M. B——, a magistrate belonging to the police-office of the Seine, begged me to examine and verify one hundred and fifty packs of cards, seized in the possession of a man whose antecedents were far from being as unblemished as his cards. The latter, indeed, were perfectly white, and this peculiarity had hitherto foiled the most minute investigation. It was impossible for the most practised eye to detect the least alteration or the slightest mark, and they all seemed very respectable packs of cards.

I consented to examine the cards, as I hoped to detect a manœuvre which must be clever as it was so carefully concealed. I could only do so after my performance was over, and so each night, before going to bed, I sat down with a bright lamp, and remained at my task till sleep or want of success routed me from my post.

Thus I spent nearly a fortnight, examining, both with my eyes and a strong magnifying-glass, the form and imperceptible varieties in the cards composing the one hundred and fifty packs. I could detect nothing, and, weary of the job, I began to agree in the opinion of the previous experts.

"I am sure there is nothing the matter with these cards," I said one night, angrily, as I threw them across the table.

Suddenly I fancied I noticed a pale spot on the glistening back of these cards, and near one of the corners. I stepped forward, and it disappeared, but, strangely enough, it reappeared as I fell back.

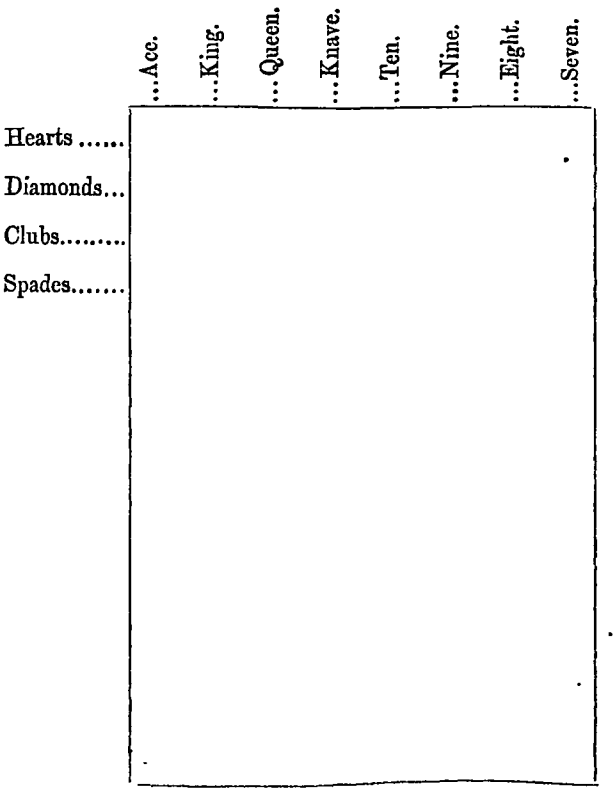
"What a magnificent dodge!" I exclaimed, in my enthusiasm. "I have it: that is a distinguishing mark."

And following a certain principle which D—— had explained to me, I assured myself that all the cards possessed a mark, which, according to its position, indicated the value and colour.

For the last quarter of an hour I have been burning with a desire to explain to my readers a most interesting process, but I am restrained by the fear that this ingenious swindling may facilitate false play. Still, it is an indubitable truth, that "to avoid a danger, it must be known." Hence, if every player were initiated into the stratagems of the card-swindlers, the latter would find it impossible to employ them.

I am, therefore, inclined to make the communication I have stated, that a single mark placed in a certain part of a card is sufficient to make it known. To explain this, I must employ a diagram:

DIAGRAM 1.



Suppose a card divided into eight parts vertically, and four horizontally, as in diagram 1; the former will indicate the value of the cards, the latter the suit. The mark is placed at the point where the two lines intersect. Such is the process: practice does the rest.

As for the process employed in impressing the

mysterious mark I have mentioned, I may be excused from stating it, as my object is to expose swindling, and not show the way to do it. Suffice it to say that, looked at closely, this point is lost in the white of the card; but, at a distance, the light renders the card brilliant, while the mark alone remains dull.

At the first blush, it will appear, perhaps, rather difficult to find out the division to which the isolated dot on the back of the card belongs. Still, by a little attention, it may be accurately detected by a practised eye. Thus, on my diagram, the dot indicates the Queen of Diamonds.

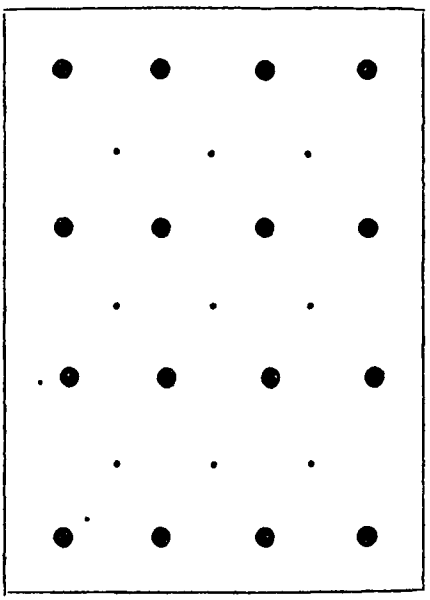
It must be remembered that a Greek using these cards stakes, I will not say his honour but, his liberty, against fortune, and that he has carefully studied an art on which his livelihood depends.

After the explanation I have given, I can easily imagine my reader forming an heroic determination.

"Since these things take place," he says to himself, "I will only play with chequered cards, and so I shall be safe."

Unfortunately, chequered cards are better adapted for swindling purposes than the others, and to prove it, I must employ another diagram. Suppose the chequer to be formed of dots or any other figures regularly arranged, as is usually the case with fancy backed cards:

DIAGRAM 2.



the first dot, starting from the left-hand top of the card, as in the previous diagram, will represent hearts; the second, downwards, diamonds; the third, clubs; and the fourth, spades. If, now, another small dot is placed by the side of one of these chequers, it will indicate the value of the card. This dot must be placed in one of the divisions marked in fig. 3. The topmost point indicates an ace; the next, to the right, a king; the third, a queen; the fourth, a knave; and so on. Of course, a single dot, as in fig. 2, when it is

placed by the third point or colour, indicates the eight of clubs.

There are many other arrangements, but they are more difficult to explain than to understand. Thus I have had chequered cards given me to inspect which had had no mark at all on them, but the pattern was more or less altered by the way in which the cards were shaped, and this simple peculiarity indicated them all.

There are also the cards on the edge of which the Greek, when playing, makes a mark with his thumb-nail, which he can detect as they pass through his hands. If he is playing écarté, the kings are thus marked, and when these pass through his fingers, he can, by a familiar trick, leave them on the pack and deal the next card. This substitution can be done so cleverly that it is impossible to detect it. I have also met persons of such practised sight that, after playing two or three games with a pack, they could recognise every card.

Returning to the prepared cards, it may be asked how it is possible to change the cards, for in all society where play goes on the cards are only taken out of the paper just before beginning.

Well! this is simple enough. The Greek finds out at what shop these houses buy their cards: at first he will make some small purchases, so that he may be regarded as a regular customer: then, on one fine day,

he says that a friend has commissioned him to buy a dozen packets of packs. The next day these are brought back under the pretext that they are not of the colour required, and as the packets are still sealed, the tradesman, full of confidence, changes them for others.

But the Greek has spent the night in undoing the bands and sealing them up again by a process known to conjurors; the cards have been all marked and properly arranged, and as the tradesman has them now in his shop, the trick is accomplished. Before long, they will reach the house where they are wanted.

All these swindling arts are very shocking, but there is another even more so in the shape of "imperceptible telegraphy." Without the slightest appearance of collusion, a Greek can tell his partner every card his opponent holds in his hand by a system similar to that of my "second sight."

I could describe many other tricks, but I will stop here. I believe I have said enough about card-sharpers and their swindling to induce a person never to sit down but with persons whose honour is unimpeachable.

CHAPTER XII.

The Inventive Genius of a Sugar-baker—Philippe the Magician—His Comic Adventures—Description of his Performance—Exposition of 1844—The King and Royal Family visit my Automata.

THE long looked-for change in my fortunes had at length arrived; my automata had gained me a certain degree of reputation, and I was making arrangements to commence my performances. Before describing these, I must devote a few pages, however, to some account of my immediate predecessor in the conjuring art, whose success in Paris at this period was most brilliant: I mean Philippe, the renowned magician, sorcerer, sleight-of-hand performer, and conjuror.

Philippe Talon was born at Alais, near Nîmes; after having carried on his sweet trade of confectioner for some time in Paris, his want of success compelled him to expatriate himself. London, that *pays de Cocagne*, the perspective El Dorado, was close at hand; so our

tradesman proceeded thither, and soon set up again in trade in the capital of the United Kingdom. The French confectioner had fair chance of success, for in addition to the English liking for sweet-stuff, French confectionary has ever enjoyed a reputation in that country, only comparable with that which *real* English blacking has so long held in France. Still, despite these advantages, it seems that fresh difficulties arose; the fogs of the Thames, or, as some say, dangerous speculations, melted the fragile wares; the comfitures suffered a decided discomfiture.

Talon packed up a second time and went to Aberdeen, to ask shelter from the Scotch mountaineers, to whom he offered in exchange his seductive cates. Unfortunately, the Scotch of Aberdeen, differing greatly from the mountaineers in *La Dame Blanche*, wear neither silk stockings nor patent leather shoes, and consume very few jujubes and tarts. Thus, the new shop would soon have undergone the fate of the other two, had not Talon's inventive genius found an issue from this precarious position.

The confectioner rightly thought that, in order to sell wares, they must be known; and in order for them to be known, they must be made known. Relying on this judicious reasoning, Talon soon compelled the Aberdonians to eat his sugar-plums, and, better still, to pay for them.

At this period, there was a company of actors at Aberdeen much in the same condition as Talon's "goodies;" they were neglected, and no one cared to try them. In vain had the manager prepared a pantomime full of tricks and blue-fire, the public remained deaf to his repeated appeals.

One fine day, Talon called on the Scotch impresario: "I have a proposal to make to you, sir," he said, without further preface, "which, if accepted, will fill your theatre, I am convinced."

"Pray explain yourself, sir," the manager said, nibbling at the bait, but putting little faith in a promise which he had good reasons for believing difficult of realisation.

"It is simply," Talon continued, "to join to the attraction of your performance a lottery, for which I will pay all the cost. This shall be the arrangement: each spectator, on entering, must pay, in addition, the sum of sixpence, giving him a claim—

"1. To a paper of mixed sugar-plums.

"2. To a lottery-ticket, by which he may gain the first prize, of the value of five pounds."

Talon also promised a new performance, the secret of which he confided to the manager under the seal of discretion.

These proposals being accepted, the bargain was soon completed, and the intelligent Talon had not deceived

himself. The public, attracted by the bonbons, the pantomime, and the promised surprise, filled the theatre.

The lottery was drawn; the prize made one person happy, and the other twelve or fifteen hundred spectators, provided with their papers of sugar-plums, consoled their disappointment by exchanging their "goodies." Under such favourable circumstances the pantomime was found charming.

Still, this piece was drawing to its close, and the promised surprise had not yet come off, when suddenly the dancers in the ballet arranged themselves in a circle, a sharp cry was heard, and a magnificent Punch bounded on to the stage. It was Talon disguised by two cotton humps and the traditional costume.

Our new artist performed Punch's eccentric dance with rare talent, and was heartily applauded. To thank the audience for their kind reception, the dancer tried to make a bow, but managed it so clumsily that he fell over on his side and could not rise again. The performers hastened to pick the wounded man up; he spoke in a faint voice, and complained of a broken rib. He earnestly asked for a box of Morrison's pills, and a servant hastened to bring him pills of an enormous size.

The public, who till then had pitied poor Punch's pain, and remained silent sympathisers, now began to

scent a jest. First they smiled, and then they laughed when the patient, taking one of the pills, pretended to swallow it. Half a dozen having followed the same road, Punch found himself perfectly recovered, so, making a polite bow, he retired amidst shouts of laughter.

Philippe had given his first performance—the confectioner had exchanged the barley-sugar stick for the magician's wand.

This burlesque scene met with extraordinary success, and the receipts swelled day by day, until the confectioner had disposed of all his wares. Then he set off to give a specimen of his new talent in other towns.

I do not know whence the new magician acquired his art, but it is probable (historical gaps are always filled up with probabilities) that Talon had learned conjuring, as he had Punch's dance, to amuse his friends. One thing is certain, the performance he offered the worthy Aberdonians was not first rate, and it was not till he left that town that he made the great improvement to which he owed his future reputation.

Henceforth, laying aside his comfitures and Punch's garb and squeak, Philippe (the name the conjuror assumed) traversed England, giving at first very modest performances. Then, his repertory becoming gradually increased by a certain number of tricks he

picked up from conjurors of the day, he attacked the large towns, and proceeded to Glasgow, where he built a wooden theatre in which to give his performances.

While the magic temple was building, Philippe noticed among the bricklayer's lads a young fellow who seemed to have remarkable intelligence, and he eventually engaged him to appear on the stage as assistant magician. Macalister (as his assistant was called) had a natural genius for tricks and models; he required no apprenticeship in this mysterious art, and indeed soon invented some tricks which attracted his master's attention.

From this moment, either by Macalister's help or for some other reason, success attended Philippe everywhere, and he began acting in theatres. After a lengthened tour through England he crossed over to Dublin, where he acquired two new tricks, which were the foundation of his future reputation.

Three Chinese, who had come to France to perform some very startling tricks, attempted some performances at Paris, which, owing to their ill success, caused a quarrel among the Celestials. In France, as well as in China, "horses fight when there is no hay in the manger," and though our jugglers did not have recourse to such extremities, they separated. One of them proceeded to Dublin, where he taught Philippe the

"gold-fish" trick, as well as the "rings. On learning the first of these tricks, Philippe was in great trouble about performing it, for he wanted a robe. He could not assume a Chinese costume, as his face had none of the distinguishing features of a mandarin, nor could he dream of a dressing-gown, for, however rich it might have been, the public would not have endured such a slight. Hence Philippe extricated himself from the difficulty by assuming the attire of a magician. It was a daring innovation, for, till that period, no conjuror had ventured to take on himself the responsibility of such a costume.

Once possessed of these two tricks, Philippe formed the project of returning to his ungrateful country; he, therefore, came to Paris in the summer of 1841, and performed at the Salle Montesquieu. The gold-fish and ring tricks, a brilliant costume, a magnificent pointed cap, and a comfortably arranged room, soon attracted large audiences, among whom was the manager of a Vienna theatre. Delighted with the performance, the latter on the spot offered the conjuror an engagement at half profits, which Philippe willingly accepted. As the Salle Montesquieu was used for public balls during the winter, this engagement also allowed him time to have a theatre constructed in readiness for his return to Paris.

The opening of the room Bonne-Nouvelle created

a sensation in Paris when Philippe came back from his Austrian tour, and crowds went to see the gold-fish trick, which the performances in the Salle Montesquieu had made known.

My reader will have the kindness to accompany me to the *Palais des Prestiges* (as the new temple of magic was christened), and we will attend one of the magician's performances.

On reaching the end of the first-floor passage in the Bonne Nouvelle Bazaar, you passed through a doorway, and were quite surprised to find yourself in a room excellently adapted for this style of performance. There were stalls, pit, gallery, and boxes, the decorations were most elegant, and, above all, there was plenty of room to stretch your legs.

An orchestra composed of six musicians of doubtful talent executed a symphony to the accompaniment of the *mélophone*, a species of accordion recently invented by a man of the name of Leclerc, who undertook the musical arrangements of the Palace.

The curtain rises.

To the great surprise of the spectators the stage is in perfect darkness.

A gentleman dressed in black emerges from a side door and walks towards us. It is Philippe: I recognise him by the Provençal twang of his accent. All the other spectators take him for the manager, and

fear they are about to hear some painful intelligence, as this gentleman holds a pistol in his hand.

Their uncertainty is, however, soon dispelled, for Philippe introduces himself. He states that he has been delayed in his preparations, but, in order to save time, he will light the innumerable candles on his stage by firing a pistol. Although a fire-arm is not required for the experiment, and is only intended to throw powder in the spectators' eyes, the candles are suddenly lighted at the sound of the detonation.

The audience applaud vociferously, and deservedly so, for this trick is remarkably striking. However much it may be applauded, the time it requires for preparation, and the mortal terror it occasions the performer, are beyond recompense.

In fact, like all experiments in which static electricity plays the chief part, this magical inflammation is not infallible. When this misfortune occurs, the position of the operator is the more embarrassing, as the phenomenon has been announced as the result of magic. Now, a magician must be omnipotent, or, if he be not so, he must avoid at all risks any failure which may lower his prestige in the eyes of the audience.

The stage once lighted, Philippe commenced his performance. The first part, composed of very average tricks, was relieved by the manœuvres of some curious automata. For instance:

The *Cossack*, which should have been called the *Grimacer*, so quaint were the contortions in which it indulged. This Cossack was also a very clever juggler, for it passed into its pocket with considerable skill various articles of jewellery its master had borrowed from the spectators.

The *magic peacock*, which uttered its un-melodious screech, expanded its gorgeous plumes, fed from its master's hand, &c.

And lastly, a *Harlequin*, like the one I repaired for Torrini.

After the first part of the performance, the curtain fell to enable preparations to be made for a scene called in the bills "A festival at a Palace in Nankin." This was an attractive title for those who dealt in that description of cloth, but was only chosen to call to the spectator's memory the Chinese trick, which would end the performance.

When the curtain rose again the stage was entirely transformed. The tablecloths had been replaced by brocades glistening with gold and precious stones (at least, they looked so at a distance); the candles, although so numerous before, had been multiplied, and gave the stage the appearance of a fiery furnace, the veritable abode of an ally of the Evil One.

The magician made his appearance in a costume which, in the public admiration, it must have exhausted

the riches of Golconda to buy, and the *Festival of Nankin* commenced with the very clever trick derived from the Chinese.

Philippe took up several rings about eight inches in diameter, and intertwined them into chains and knots with the greatest possible ease. Then suddenly, when it seemed impossible for him to unravel his handiwork, he blew upon them, and the rings fell separately at his feet. This trick produced a charming illusion.

The one that succeeded it, and which I never saw performed by any one else, was quite equal to the preceding one in interest.

Macalister, the Scotch bricklayer (who on the stage was a negro of the name of Domingo), brought in on a table two sugar-loaves still covered with that horrible paper which the honest grocer sells at the price of colonial wares. Philippe borrowed a dozen handkerchiefs (not from accomplices), and after placing them in a blunderbuss, he fired at one of the sugar-loaves chosen by the audience. He then broke it asunder with an axe, and all the handkerchiefs were found in it.

Next came *Fortunatus's hat.* Philippe, after producing from this hat, which he had borrowed from a spectator, an innumerable number of objects, at last pulled out enough feathers to make a bed. The most amusing part of this trick consisted in the conjuror

making a lad kneel down, who was completely buried in this avalanche of feathers.

Another striking trick was the one called "The Kitchen of Parafaragaramus." At Philippe's request two schoolboys came on the stage, whom he dressed, one as scullion, the other as professed cook. Thus metamorphosed, the two young *cordons bleus* underwent all sorts of pleasantries and mystifications. (This was a trick of Castelli's school.)

The conjuror then proceeded to perform the trick: for this purpose he suspended from a tripod an enormous copper caldron full of water, and ordered the two lads to put in it dead pigeons, an assortment of vegetables, and plenty of seasoning. Then he lit some spirits of wine under the caldron, and pronounced some magical incantations. At his voice, the pigeons, returning to life, flew out of the caldron; while the water, vegetables, and seasoning had entirely disappeared.

Philippe usually ended the evening's performance with the famous Chinese trick, to which he had given the pompous name of "Neptune's Basins, or the Gold-Fish."

The magician, clothed in his brilliant costume, mounted on a sort of low table, which isolated him from the stage. After a few manœuvres to prove he

had nothing about him, he threw a shawl at his feet, and, on lifting it up, he displayed a glass basin filled with water, in which gold-fish swam about. This was thrice repeated, with the same result; but, in his desire to improve on his brethren of the Celestial Empire, the French conjuror had added a variation to their trick, which gave an amusing termination to the performance. Throwing the shawl on the ground for the fourth time, several animals, such as rabbits, ducks, chickens, &c., emerged from it. This trick was performed, if not gracefully, at least in a way to excite the lively admiration of the spectators.

Generally, Philippe was very amusing in his entertainment. His experiments were performed with a good deal of conscientiousness, skill, and dash, and I have no hesitation in saying that the conjuror of the Bonne-Nouvelle Bazaar might then be considered one of the best of the day. Philippe quitted Paris the following year, and has since performed entirely in foreign countries, or the provinces.

Philippe's success would not have failed to rekindle my desire to realise my theatrical schemes, had not, at this period, a misfortune hurled me into a state of profound wretchedness. I lost my wife.

Left with three young children, I was obliged to undertake their charge, although so unskilled in house-

hold cares. Thus, at the end of five years, robbed by some, deceived by others, I had almost lost all that my labour had produced me, and was going to ruin.

Forced by my intolerable position, I determined on reconstituting my home, and I married again. I shall have so many occasions of speaking of my new wife, that I shall refrain at present from praising her according to her deserts; besides, I am not sorry to abridge these domestic details, which, though personally important to me, only possess a very slight interest in my story.

The Exhibition of 1844 was about to open, so I asked and obtained leave to exhibit some specimens of my skill. The site granted me, opposite the door of honour, was undoubtedly one of the best in the hall, and I erected a circular stand, on which I placed a specimen of all the mechanical pieces I had as yet made. Among these my *Writer* took the first place, which M. G—— had been kind enough to lend me for the occasion. I may say I enjoyed all the honour of the exhibition, for my productions were constantly surrounded by a crowd of spectators, who were all the more eager as the performance was gratis.

Louis Philippe paid daily visits to the Palace of Industry, and as my automata had been pointed out as deserving his attention, he evinced a wish to see

them, and gave me twenty hours' notice of his visit. I thus had time enough to make all my arrangements. The king arrived, holding the Comte de Paris by the hand, and I stood on his left hand to explain my various articles. The Duchess of Orleans was by my side, and the other members of the royal family formed a circle round his majesty, while the crowd, kept back by the keepers of the palace and the police agents, left an open space round my exhibition.

The king was in a charming humour, and seemed to take a pleasure in all I showed him. He frequently asked me questions, and missed no occasion to show his excellent judgment. At the end of the *séance*, the party stopped before my Writer. This automaton, it must be borne in mind, wrote or drew according to the question asked. The king made the following inquiry: "How many inhabitants does Paris contain?" The writer raised its left hand as if to indicate that it required a sheet of paper, on receiving which, it wrote very distinctly, "Paris contains 998,964 inhabitants."

The paper passed from the king's hand into those of the royal family, and all admired the beauty of the writing; but I saw that Louis Philippe had a critique to offer, his smile proved that plainly enough. Hence I was not surprised when, pointing to the paper which had come back to him, he said:

"Monsieur Robert-Houdin, you did not, perhaps, recollect that this number will not agree with the new census, which is almost completed?"

Contrary to my expectations, I felt quite at ease with my illustrious visitors.

"Sire!" I replied, with sufficient assurance for a man not much accustomed to the society of crowned heads, "I hope at that period my automaton will be intelligent enough to make any necessary corrections."

The king appeared satisfied with this reply, and I took advantage of his good humour to mention that my Writer was also a poet, and explained that, if he would deign to offer it an unfinished quatrain, the automaton would fill up the rhyme in the fourth line. The king chose the following:

Lorsque dans le malheur, accablé de souffrance,
Abandonné de tous, l'homme va succomber,
Quel est l'ange divin qui vient le consoler?
C'est . . . . . .

L'Espérance, the writer added to the fourth line.

"That is really charming," the king said to me. "But, Monsieur Robert-Houdin," he added, in a confidential tone, "you must have given your writer instructions in the poetic art?"

"Yes, sire, as far as my weak powers permitted."

"Then my compliment is merited more by the master than the pupil."

I bowed to thank the king as much for his compliment as for the delicate manner in which it was conveyed.

"Now then, Monsieur Robert-Houdin," Louis Philippe continued, "I see by the notice attached to this automaton that it is a draughtsman, in addition to its merits as a writer and poet. If it be so, come," he said," addressing the Comte de Paris, "choose your own subject for a drawing."

Thinking to cause the prince an agreeable surprise, I had recourse to palmistry to influence his decision, and he, consequently, selected a crown. The automaton began drawing the outline of this regal ornament with great skill, and every one followed its movements with interest, when, to my great disappointment, the point of the draughtsman's pencil broke, and the crown could not be finished. I was going to recommence the experiment, when the king declined, with thanks.

"As you have learned to draw," he said to the Comte de Paris, "you can finish this for yourself."

This performance, besides being the prelude of the kindly interest the Orleans family afterwards displayed towards me, probably exerted some influence on the decision of the jury, which granted me a silver medal.

CHAPTER XIII.

My proposed Reforms—I build a Theatre in the Palais Royal—Formalities—General Rehearsal—Sifigular Effect of my Performance—The Largest and Smallest Theatre in Paris—Tribulation—My first Performance—Panic—Discouragement—A Fallible Prophet—Recovery—Success.

It may seem strange that I thus pass from my mechanical labours to my studies in sleight of hand; but if my readers will bear in mind that these two sciences were to unite in producing my success, it will easily be understood that I felt an equal degree of affection for them, and that after mentioning one I must allude to the other. The Exhibition did not drive from my thoughts my theatrical projects.

The instruments intended for my future performances were on the point of completion, for I had never stopped working at them. I was hence enabled to commence operations as soon as an opportunity offered. In the mean time, I determined on the changes I in-

tended to introduce into the usual routine of conjuring performances.

Remembering Torrini's principles, I intended to have an elegant and simple stage, unencumbered by all the paraphernalia of the ordinary conjuror, which looks more like a toyshop than a serious performance. I would have none of those enormous metal shades usually placed over objects that are to disappear, and whose secret duties cannot escape the notice of the simplest spectator. Apparatus of transparent or opaque glass, according to circumstances, would suffice for all my operations. In the performance of my tricks I also intended to abolish those double-bottomed boxes of which some conjurors made such an abuse, as well as all instruments designed to make up for the performer's want of skill. Real sleight of hand must not be the tinman's work but the artist's, and people do not visit the latter to see instruments perform.

Of course, after the abuse I have showered upon the use of accomplices, I quite did away with them. I have always regarded such trickery as unworthy a real artist, as it raises doubts as to his skill. Besides, having frequently acted as an accomplice, I remembered the unfavourable impression this employment had left upon me as to the talent of my partner.

Jets of gas, covered by opaque globes, were to be substituted on my stage for the thousands of candles,

whose brilliancy is only intended to dazzle the spectator and thus injure the effect of the experiments.

Among the reforms I intended to introduce on the stage, the most important was the abolition of those long tablecloths reaching to the ground, beneath which an assistant is always suspected, and, generally, with some show of reason. For these immense chests of deception I substituted consoles of gilt wood after the style of Louis XV.

Of course, I abstained from any eccentric costume, and I never thought of making any change in the attire civilised society has agreed to accept for evening dress, for I was always of opinion that bizarre accoutrements, far from giving the wearer any consideration, on the contrary cast disfavour upon him.

I had also traced out for my performances a line of conduct from which I never diverged; that was to make no puns or play upon words, and never to permit myself to be guilty of a mystification, even were I sure of gaining the greatest success.

Finally, I wished to offer new experiments divested of all charlatanism, and possessing no other resources than those offered by skilful manipulation, and the influence of illusions.

This was, it will be seen, a complete regeneration in the art of conjuring; my only fear was whether the public would accept these important reforms and such

elegant simplicity. It is true, Antonio, the usual confidant of my plans and thoughts, strongly encouraged me.

"Don't be alarmed about your success," he said; "you have precedents to prove the good taste of the public and their willingness to accept reforms based on reason. Remember Talma appearing suddenly at the Théâtre-Français clothed in the simple antique toga, at a time when tragedies were performed in silk coats, powdered perukes, and red heels."

I accepted the reasoning, though I did not recognise the justice of the comparison. In fact, Talma could impose his taste on the public by the authority of his talent and reputation, while I, who as yet held no brevet rank in the army of conjurors, trembled to see my innovations badly received.

We had now reached the month of December, 1844, and, having nothing further to detain me, I decided on striking the grand blow—that is to say, I went out one morning determined on finding a site for my theatre. I passed the whole day in attempting to find a spot combining advantage of situation, chance of receipts, and many other benefits. I stopped through preference at the best spots and before the handsomest houses, but found nothing that exactly suited me.

Wearied with searching, I singularly lowered my pretensions and wants. Here I found an enormous

price asked for a room that only in part suited me; there, proprietors who would not, for any consideration, have performances in their houses; in short, obstacles and impossibilities on all sides.

Thus I ran about Paris for a fortnight, passing from the largest to the smallest houses in turn, and ended by convincing myself that fate was adverse to my plans. Antonio relieved me from my difficulty, for that worthy friend, who aided me in the search, came to tell me he had found a room in the Palais Royal which could be easily converted into a theatre. I went straight to 164 in the Galerie de Valois, where I found, in fact, all the conditions I had sought elsewhere, combined.

The proprietor of this house had been dreaming for a long time in vain about a benevolent tenant, who, while paying an exorbitant price for his room, would come in without expecting any repairs to be done. I was, therefore, most welcome, when I not only agreed to pay the rent asked, but endured passively every sort of imposition. Indeed, I would have given much more, so afraid as I was lest this desirable house should slip from me.

When the bargain was concluded, I applied to an architect, who soon brought me the plan of a charming room, which I jumped at. A few days later he set to work, partitions were knocked down, the ground

cleared, and the carpenters began erecting my theatre, which was to contain from 180 to 200 persons. Though small, this room was all I wanted for my style of performance; for supposing, according to my famous calculations, that it was constantly full, it would be an excellent affair for me.

Antonio, ever filled with zeal for my interests, paid constant visits to my workmen and stimulated their activity, but one day my friend was struck by a sudden idea.

"By the way," he said, "have you thought of asking permission from the Prefect of Police to construct your theatre?"

"Not yet," I replied, quietly. "It cannot be refused me, as this construction makes no change in the architectural arrangements of the house."

"That is possible," Antonio added, "but in your place I would take this step immediately, that no difficulty may occur when it is too late."

I followed his advice, and we went together to M. X——'s office, who then had the direction of theatrical affairs. After an hour waiting, we were introduced to the head of the office, who, being at the moment engaged in some interesting reading, did not seem even to notice our presence. In ten minutes, however, M. X—— laid down his book, opened and shut a few drawers, called his clerk, gave orders, lifted his spec-

tacles, and made us a sign that he was ready to hear a sentence which I had already commenced twice or thrice without being able to end it. This impertinent coolness made my blood boil; still I said, as politely as my vexation would allow me,

"I have come, sir, to ask your permission to open a room for performances of magic and sleight of hand in the Palais Royal."

"Sir," the head of the office replied, very dryly, "if you have chosen the Palais Royal for your performance, I can tell you you will not obtain permission."

"Why so, sir?" I said, in consternation.

"Because a ministerial decree forbids any new establishment being opened there."

"But pray consider, sir, that not being aware of this decision, I have taken a room on a long lease, and my theatre is at this moment being built. The refusal of this permission will be my ruin. What can I do now?"

"That is not my business," the bureaucrat replied, disdainfully; "I am not a theatrical agent."

With these words M. X——, after the method employed by solicitors and physicians to announce that a consultation is over, rose, led us to the door, and, himself opening it, showed us clearly what we had to do. Antonio and myself, equally in despair, remained for more than an hour at the door of the Prefecture,

vainly taxing our brains how to escape from this difficulty. With all our reasoning, we always arrived at the mournful conclusion that we could do no less than stop the building, and compound with B—— to take the lease off my hands. It was my ruin, Antonio understood as well as I, and he could offer me no consolation.

"But, stay," he said, suddenly, striking his forehead, "I have an idea. Tell me, during the late exhibition, did you not sell a 'mysterious clock' to M. Benjamin Delessert, a banker?"

"Well, suppose I did, what has that to do with——"

"What! do you not understand me? M. Delessert is brother of the Prefect of Police. Go and see him; he is said to be good hearted, perhaps he will give you good advice, or even better than that. If he would speak to his brother on your behalf, we should be saved, for M. Gabriel Delesser is omnipotent in theatrical matters."

I adopted Antonio's advice with joy, and proceeded to carry it into effect. M. B. Delessert received me kindly, complimented me on the clock, with which he was quite satisfied, and made me inspect his magnificent picture-gallery, in which it was put up. Emboldened by this kind reception, I explained to him the embarrassment in which I was placed.

"Well, M. Robert-Houdin," he said to me, "console yourself; we may possibly arrange this affair. I am going to give a large party next Wednesday evening, to which my brother has promised to come. Do me the pleasure to join us; you will give us a specimen of your talents, and when M. le Préfet has learned to appreciate you, I will speak to him of your matter."

On Wednesday, I proceeded to the house of my new protector, who had the kindness to present me to some of his guests, while confidentially praising my sleight-of-hand talents. My performance came off, and, judging by the applause I received, I may say it justified their anticipated compliments. A week had scarce elapsed when I received a summons to the office of the Prefect of Police. I went there with all speed, and M. Gabriel Delessert informed me that he had been able to induce the minister to revoke his decision. "Hence you can now go," he added, "and obtain your permission in M. X——'s office, where it has been sent for some formalities."

It was curious about my reception on this occasion, but M. X—— displayed such extreme politeness towards me, that it largely made up for the cavalier treatment he had offered me on the first occasion. Far from leaving me standing, he would willingly have offered me two chairs instead of one, and when I quitted his office, he overwhelmed me with all the

attentions due to a man protected by a superior power. I was too happy to bear M. X—— any malice; hence we separated quite reconciled.

I will spare my readers the numberless tribulations which accompanied my unending building; mistakes in time and money are so usual in such matters, that I need not allude to them here. At length, all this was over, and with the liveliest pleasure I saw the last workman depart not to return again.

We had now reached the end of June, and I hoped to commence at the beginning of July. For this purpose I hastened my preparations, for each day was an enormous loss, as I was spending much and earning nothing.

I had already given some partial rehearsals, and I now decided on holding one to precede the general rehearsal, but, as I was not quite sure of the success of my experiments, I only invited half a dozen intimate friends, pledged to give me their opinion with the greatest severity. This performance was fixed for the 25th June, 1845, and on that day I made my preparations with as much care as if I were going to give my opening performance, for I had been suffering for nearly a month from a regular panic, which I could attribute to no other cause than my nervous and impressionable temperament.

I could not get a wink of sleep, my appetite had

left me, and I thought of my performances with a species of dread. I, who had hitherto treated so lightly the performances I gave to my friends—I, who had obtained such success at Aubusson, trembled like a child.

The reason was, that hitherto I had performed before spectators ever smiling or ready to smile, and the success of my experiments made no difference to me. Now, I was about to appear before a real audience, and I trembled at the thought of "the right they purchased at the door."

On the appointed evening, at eight precisely, my friends having duly arrived, the curtain rose, and I appeared on the stage. Half a dozen smiles greeted my appearance, which rekindled my courage and even gave me a species of coolness. The first of my experiments was performed very decently, and yet my address was very badly repeated. I recited it like a schoolboy who tries to remember his lesson, but the good favour of my spectators once acquired, I continued famously.

To explain what follows, I must mention that, during the whole day, heavy clouds had hung over Paris; and the evening, far from bringing any relief, wafted into the room puffs of heated air, which seemed to issue from a stove.

Well, I had scarcely reached the middle of the first

part, when two of my spectators had yielded to the soporific influences of the weather and my "patter." I could excuse them, however, for my own eyelids were beginning to droop. Not being accustomed to sleep standing, however, I held my own.

But it is well known that nothing is so contagious as sleep, hence the epidemic made rapid progress. At the end of a few moments the last of the survivors let his head fall on his chest and completed the sextett, whose snoring, continually *crescendo*, at length drowned my voice. My situation was disagreeable, and though I tried to arouse my audience by speaking in a louder key, I only succeeded in causing one or two eyelids to open, which, after a few insane winks, closed again.

At length the first part of the performance was over and the curtain fell, and with much pleasure I stretched myself in an arm-chair to enjoy a few minutes' rest! Five minutes would be enough, and I was asleep before I could repel the invader. My son, who helped me on the stage, had not waited so long; he had laid himself on the ground and was sleeping like a top, while my wife, a busy, courageous woman, though struggling against the common foe, watched near me, and, in her tender care, did not disturb a sleep I required so much. Besides, she had peeped through the hole in the curtain, and our spectators seemed so happy,

that she had not the heart to disturb them. But, insensibly, her strength betrayed her courage, and unable to resist the temptation of a nap, she fell asleep too.

The pianist, who represented my orchestra, having seen the curtain fall, and hearing no movement on the stage, thought my performance was over, and determined on going. As the porter had orders to turn off the gas at the main when he saw my pianist go out, and was most anxious to be exact at the beginning of his engagement, he hastened to obey my orders, and plunged the room into utter darkness.

We had been enjoying this delightful sleep for about two hours, when I was aroused by a confused sound of voices and shouts. I rubbed my eyes and wondered where I was, but seeing nothing, I grew quite alarmed. "Can I possibly have gone blind?" I exclaimed; "I can see nothing!"

"Hang it, no more can we see anything!" said a voice, which I recognised as Antonio's. "For goodness' sake, give us a light!"

"Yes, yes, a light!" my five other spectators repeated in chorus.

We were soon on our feet; the curtain was raised, and then, having lighted some candles, we saw our five sleepers rubbing their eyes, and trying to find out where they were; while Antonio was growling away under the stalls, where he had fallen in his sleep.

All was then explained; we had a hearty laugh at the adventure, and separated with a promise of meeting again.

There were only four days to the 1st of July, and to any one acquainted with the preparations for a first performance, and, far more important still, for opening a theatre, this lapse of time will appear very short, for there is always so much to be done at the last moment. Thus, the 1st of July arrived, and I was not prepared, and the opening did not take place till three days later.

On this day, by a strange coincidence, the Hippodrome and the "fantastic soirées" of Robert-Houdin, the largest and smallest stage in Paris, were opened to the public. The 3rd of July, 1845, saw two bills placarded on the walls of Paris; one enormous, belonging to the Hippodrome, while the other, of far more modest proportions, announced my performances. Still, as in the fable of the reed and the oak, the large theatre, in spite of the skill of the managers, has undergone many changes of fortune; while the smaller one has continually enjoyed the public favour.

I have sacredly kept a proof of my first bill, the form and colour of which has always remained the same since that date. I copy it word for word here, both to furnish an idea of its simplicity, and to display

the programme of the experiments I then offered to the public:

TO DAY, THURSDAY, JULY 3, 1845.

FIRST REPRESENTATION

OF

THE FANTASTIC SOIRÉES

OF

ROBERT-HOUDIN.

AUTOMATA, SLEIGHT OF HAND, MAGIC.

The Performance will be composed of entirely novel Experiments invented by M. ROBERT-HOUDIN.

AMONG THEM BEING:

THE CABALISTIC CLOCK.
AURIOL AND DEBUREAU.
THE ORANGE-TREE.
THE MYSTERIOUS BOUQUET.
THE HANDKERCHIEF.
PIERROT IN THE EGG.
OBEDIENT CARDS.
THE MIRACULOUS FISH.
THE FASCINATING OWL.
THE PASTRYCOOK OF THE PALAIS ROYAL.

TO COMMENCE AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

Box-office open at Half-past Seven.

Price of places: Upper Boxes, 1 fr. 50 c.; Stalls, 3 fr.; Boxes, 4 fr.; Dress Circle, 5 fr.

The day of my first representation had at length arrived. To say how I spent it is impossible; all I remember is, that, at the end of a feveris hand sleepless night, occasioned by the multiplicity of my tasks, I had to organise and foresee everything, for I was at once manager, machinist, author, and actor. What a terrible responsibility for a poor artist, whose life had hitherto been spent among his tools!

At seven in the evening, a thousand things had still to be done, but I was in a state of febrile excitement which doubled my strength and energy, and I got through them all.

Eight o'clock struck and echoed through my heart like the peal that summons the culprit to execution; never in my life did I experience such emotion and torture. Ah! if I could only draw back! Had it been possible to fly and abandon this position I had so long desired, with what happiness would I have returned to my peaceful avocations! And yet, why did I feel this mad terror? I know not, for three-fourths of the room were filled with persons on whose indulgence I could rely.

I made a final attack on my pusillanimity.

"Come!" I said to myself, "courage! I have my name, my future, my children's fortune at stake: courage!"

This thought restored me; I passed my hand several

times over my agitated features, ordered the curtain to be raised, and without further reflection I walked boldly on the stage.

My friends, aware of my sufferings, received me with some encouraging applause; this kind reception restored my confidence, and, like a gentle dew, refreshed my mind and senses. I began.

To assert that I acquitted myself fairly would be a proof of vanity, and yet it would be excusable, for I received repeated signs of applause from my audience. But how to distinguish between the applause of the friendly and the paying public? I was glad to deceive myself, and my experiments gained by it.

The first part was over and the curtain fell. My wife came directly to embrace me, to encourage me, and thank me for my courageous efforts. I may now confess it: I believed that I had been alone severe to myself, and that it was possible all this applause was sterling coin. This belief did me an enormous good; and why should I conceal it, tears of joy stood in my eyes, which I hastened to wipe away lest my feelings might prevent my preparations for the second part.

The curtain rose again, and I approached my audience with a smile on my lips. I judged of this change in my face by those of my spectators, for they began all at once to share my good humour.

How many times since have I tried this imita-

tive faculty on the part of the public? If you are anxious, ill-disposed, or vexed, or should your face bear the stamp of any annoying impression, your audience, straightway imitating the contraction of your features, begins to frown, grows serious, and ill-disposed to be favourable to you. If, however, you appear on the stage with a cheerful face, the most sombre brows unwrinkle, and every one seems to say to the artist: "How d'ye do, old fellow, your face pleases me, I only want an opportunity to applaud you." Such seemed to be the case with my public at this moment.

It was more easy for me to feel at my ease as I was beginning my favourite experiment, "the surprising pocket-handkerchief," a medley of clever deceptions. After borrowing a handkerchief, I produced from it a multitude of objects of every description, such as sugar-plums, feathers of every size up to a drum-major's, fans, comic journals, and, as a *finale*, an enormous basket of flowers, which I distributed to the ladies. This trick was perfectly successful, but, to tell the truth, I had it at my fingers' ends.

The next performance was the "orange-tree," and I had every reason to calculate on this trick, for, in my private rehearsals, it was the one I always did best. I began with a few juggling tricks as introduction, which were perfectly successful, and I had every reason

to believe I was getting through it capitally, when a sudden thought crossed my mind and paralysed me. I was assailed by a panic which must have been felt to be understood, and I will try to explain it by an illustration.

When you are learning to swim, the teacher begins by giving you this important piece of advice: "Have confidence, and all will be well." If you follow his advice, you easily keep yourself up on the water, and it seems perfectly natural; thus you learn to swim. But it often happens that a sudden thought crosses your mind like lightning: "Suppose my strength failed me!" From that time you hurry your movements, you redouble your speed, the water no longer sustains you, you flounder about, and, if a helping hand were not by, you would be lost.

Such was my situation on the stage; the thought had suddenly struck me: "Suppose I were to fail!" And immediately I began to talk quick, hurried on in my anxiety to finish, felt confused, and, like the tired swimmer, I floundered about without being able to emerge from the chaos of my ideas.

Oh! then I experienced a torture, an agony which I could not describe, but which might easily become mortal were it prolonged.

The real public were cold and silent, my friends were foolish enough to applaud, but the rest remained

quiet. I scarcely dared to look round the room, and my experiment ended I know not how.

I proceeded to the next, but my nervous system had reached such a degree of irritation that I no longer knew what I said or did. I only felt that I was speaking with extraordinary volubility, so that the four last tricks of my performance were done in a few minutes.

The curtain fell very opportunely; my strength was exhausted; but a little longer and I should have had to crave the indulgence of my audience.

In my life I never passed so frightful a night as the one following my first performance. I had a fever, I am quite certain, but that was as nothing in comparison with my moral sufferings. I had no desire left or courage to appear on the stage. I wished to sell, give up, or give away, if necessary, an establishment which taxed my strength too severely.

"No," I said to myself, "I am not born for this life of emotion. I will quit the parching atmosphere of a theatre. I will, even at the expense of a brilliant fortune, return to my gentle and calm employment."

The next morning, incapable of rising, and, indeed, firmly resolved to give up my representations, I had the bill taken down that announced my performance for that evening. I had made up my mind as to all the consequences of this resolution. Thus, the sacri-

fice accomplished, I found myself far more calm, and even yielded to the imperious claims of a sleep I had for a long time denied myself.

I have now arrived at a moment when I shall quit for ever the mournful and wearisome details of the numerous misfortunes that preceded my representations; but my readers will notice with some surprise to what a futile circumstance I owed my release from this state of discouragement, which I fancied would last for ever.

The repose I had taken during the day and the following night had refreshed my blood and my ideas. I regarded my situation under a very different aspect, and I had already made up my mind not to give up my theatre, when one of my friends—or, who called himself so—came to pay me a visit.

After expressing his regret at the unhappy result of my first performance, at which he had been present, he said:

"I called into see you because I noticed your room was closed, and I had a wish to express my feelings to you on the subject. I must say, then, to speak frankly" (I have noticed that this phrase is always followed by some bad compliment, which is meant to pass under the guise of friendly frankness), "that you are perfectly right to quit a profession beyond your strength, and that you have acted wisely by anti-

cipating with good grace a decision to which you would have been forced sooner or later. However," he added, with a self-sufficient air, "I foretold it. I always thought you were committing an act of madness, and that your theatre would no sooner be opened than you would be obliged to close it."

These cruel compliments, addressed under the cloak of apocryphal frankness, wounded me deeply. I could easily detect that this offerer of advice, sacrificing to his vanity the slight affection he felt for me, had only come to see me in order to parade his perspicacity and the justice of his previsions, of which he had never mentioned a syllable to me. Well, this infallible prophet, who foresaw events so truly, was far from suspecting the change he was producing in me. The more he talked, the more he confirmed me in the resolution of continuing my performances.

"Who told you my room was closed?" I said, in a tone that had nothing affectionate about it. "If I did not perform yesterday, it was because, worn out by the fatigue I have undergone for some time, I wished to rest for at least one day. Your foreboding will, therefore, be disappointed, when I tell you that I shall perform this very evening. I hope, in my second representation, to take my revenge on the public; and this time they will judge me less severely than you have done. I am quite convinced of it.

The conversation having taken this turn, could not be continued much longer. My offerer of advice, dissatisfied at my reception of him, quitted me, and I have never seen him since. Yet, I bear him no malice; on the contrary, if he reads my Memoirs, I beg to offer him in this place my thanks for the happy revolution he produced in me by wounding my vanity to the quick.

Bills were immediately posted to announce my performance for that evening, and I made my preparations calmly, while thinking over those parts of my performance in which it would be advisable to introduce a change.

This second representation went on much better than I had hoped, and my audience appeared satisfied. Unfortunately, that audience was small, and my receipts, consequently, were the same. Still, I accepted it all philosophically, for the success I had obtained gave me confidence in the future.

However, I soon had real causes for consolation. The celebrities of the press came to my representations, and described my performance in the most flattering terms. Some contributors to the comic papers also made very pleasant allusions to my performances and myself. Among others, the present editor of the *Charivari* wrote an article full of fun and dash about my performances, which he terminated with some

lines, expressive of his decided opinion that I belonged to the family of Robert le Diable and Robert Macaire.

Finally, the *Illustration*, desirous of evincing its sympathy, engaged Eugène Forey to draw a sketch of my theatre. Such publicity soon attracted the attention of the first Parisian circles: people came to see my performances: they appointed to meet at my room, and from this moment commenced that reputation which has never left me since.

END OF VOL. I.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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